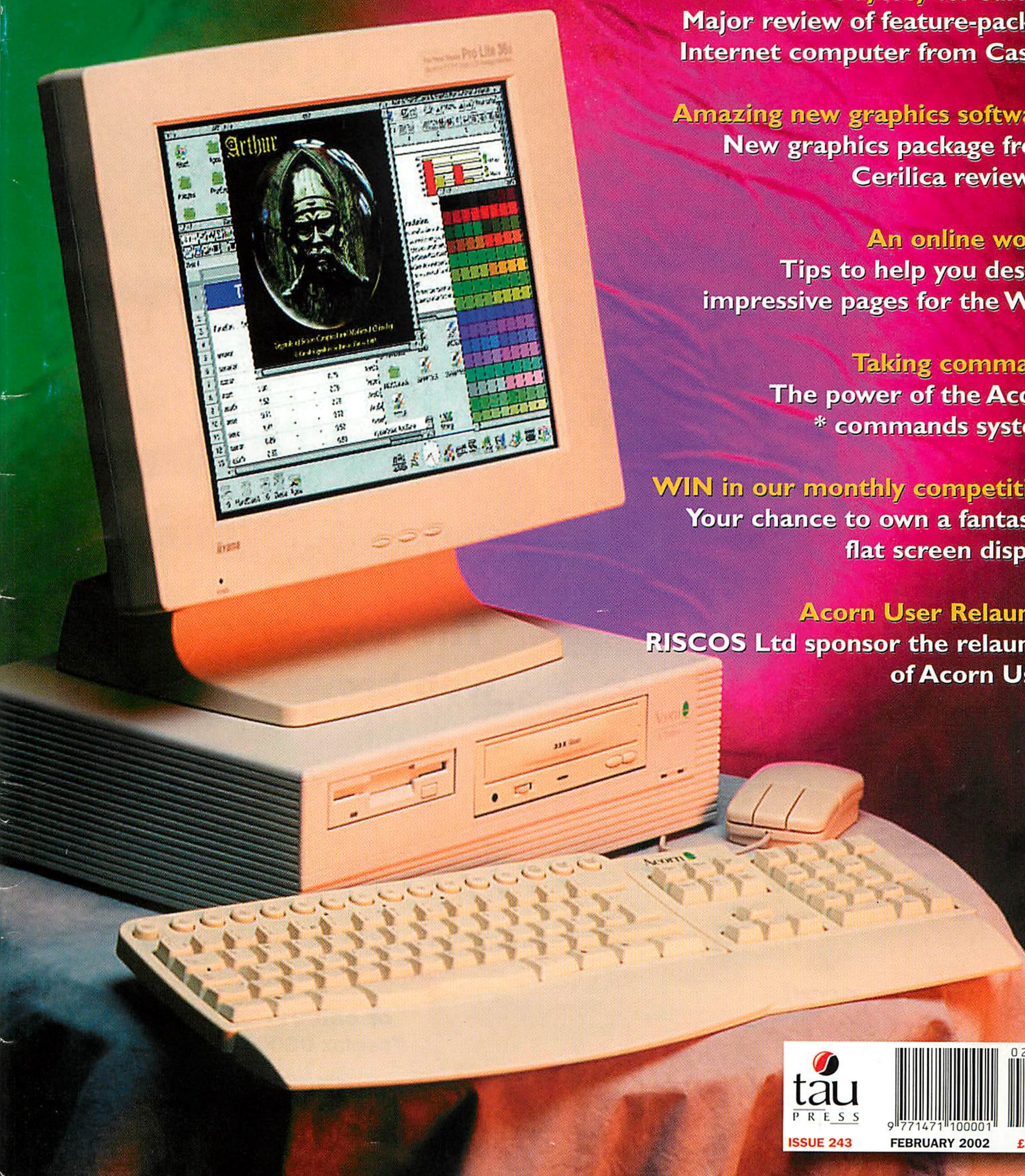
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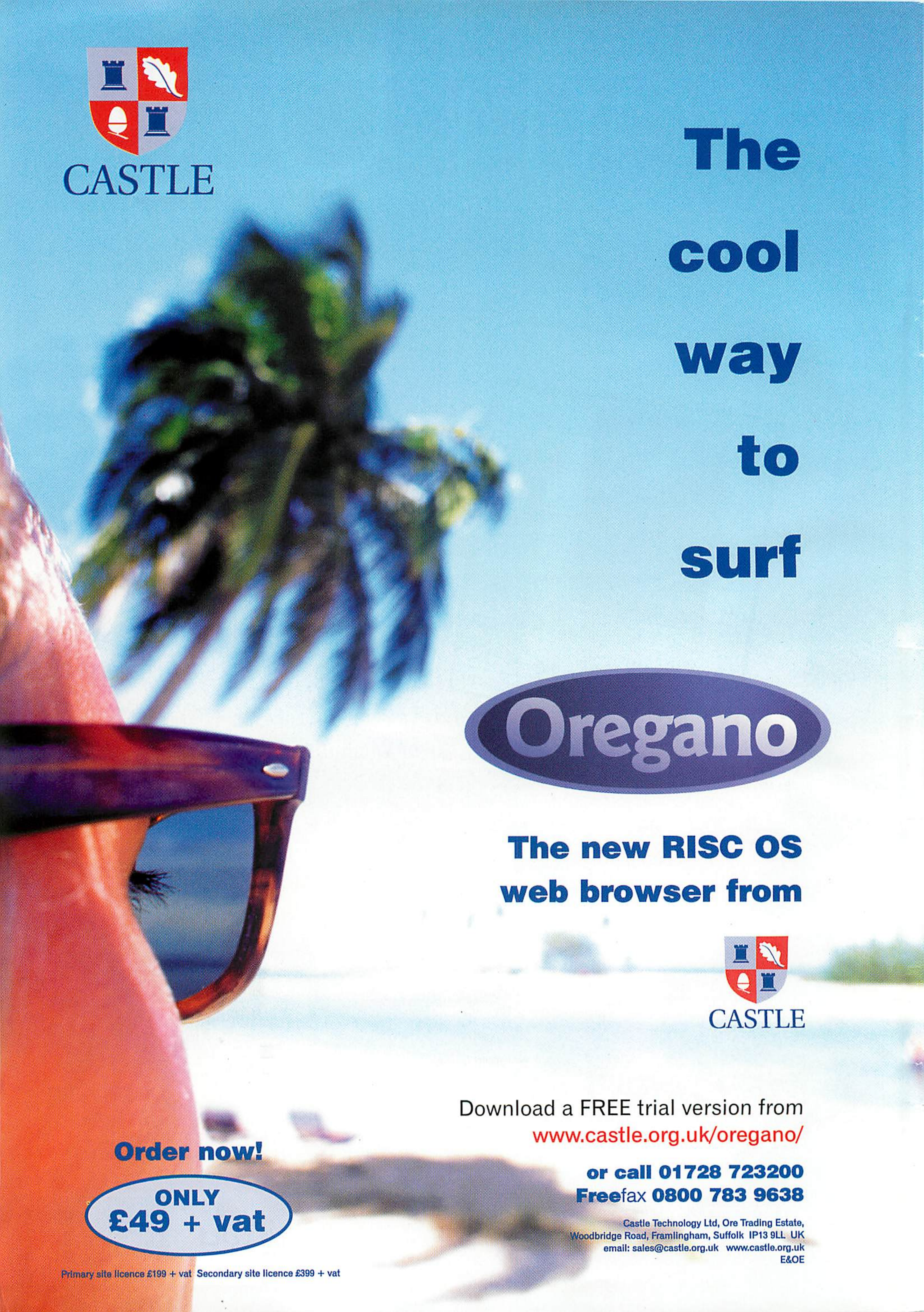
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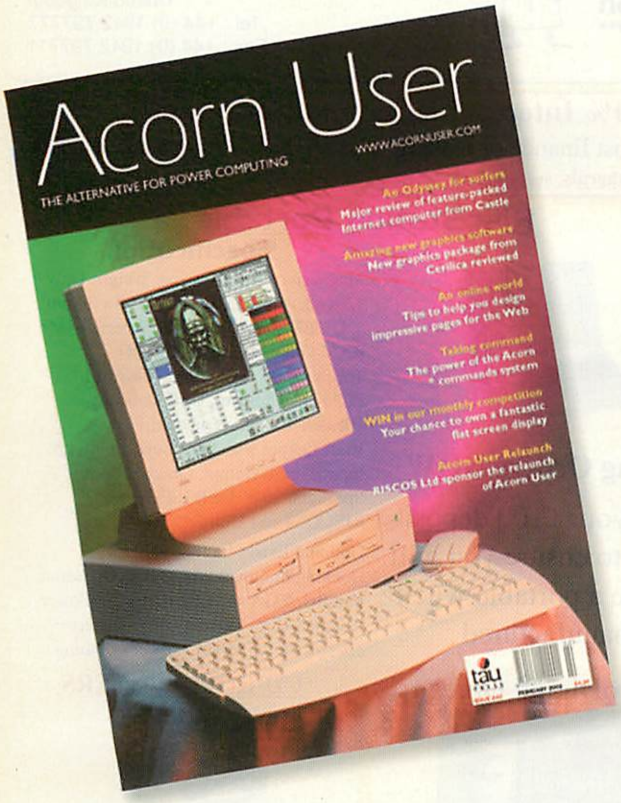
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February 2002 Issue 243



Relaunch sponsor's comment

Welcome to the new look Acorn User. I wish the new editorial team at Tau Press all the best for the future.

2002 promises to be an interesting year for new RISC OS hardware. Castle luanched the first of their *Neuron*-based products, the *Slym*, at the BETT Show 2002. RiscStation are taking orders for their new, as yet un-named, portable, and finally 2002 might finally be the year when the MicroDigital *Omega* starts shipping.

My personal wish for 2002 is for everyone who uses or develops RISC OS to start telling everyone how good it is. Unfortunately there are some people who think that the only way to improve the RISC OS market is to complain about almost everything that RISCOS Ltd or other companies do.

The effect of all the bickering on both the people developing for RISC OS and more importantly anyone who might be thinking of starting to use RISC OS can be most disheartening. So let's all use 2002 to be positive about promoting RISC OS, and let's cut out the negative vibes that a few people seem to think it is their duty to promote.

The world computer market is changing and I want to see RISC OS take its rightful place in that market.

Paul Middleton
RISCOS Ltd

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Canon BJC S400 colour €	A4	£67.23	£79.00
Canon BJC S450 colour €#	A4	£85.11	£100.00
Canon BJC S4500 col €#	A3	£255.00	£299.62
Canon BJC S800 Photo #	A4	£285.00	£334.87
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HP 940 inc. RO driver	A4	£92.00	£108.10
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60.0GB *	£92.00	£108.10
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170MB	£35.00	£41.12	£85.00	£99.87
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810MB #	£70.00	£82.25	£100.00	£117.50
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4.3GB #	£129.00	£151.58	£159.00	£186.83

A30X0 version includes CD ROM i/f which can be used in A3020 or A4000. For external A3000 i/f add £20.00 +VAT # includes partitioning software

Upgrade	A310	A400	A540	A3000	A3010	A5000
1-2MB	-------	£25	-------	£15	£15	---------
2-4MB	-------	£50	-------	---------	---------	£45
1-4MB	£35 *	£75	-------	£35	£45	---------
4-8MB	£55	£55	£45	£55	---------	£55 *#
RISCOS Carrier	£19 *	£19 *	-------	---------	---------	---------
RISCOS 3.1	£25	£25	£25	£25	---------	£25
MEMC1a	£20	£20	-------	---------	---------	---------
Arm3(33)	£45	£45	-------	£45 *	---------	---------
Arm3(25) & FPA10	£85	£85	-------	£85 *	---------	---------
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A3020/A4000 memory only £40.
All above prices exclude VAT

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Software Bargains.

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(All Prices below include VAT) **THE BARGAIN BASEMENT** (for Software see Jan issue)

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SVGA 14" refurb 90 days wty	£45.00	£52.87
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SVGA 17" refurb 90 days wty	£81.00	£95.17
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IDE 230 Syquest int. & media	£99.00	£116.32
SCSI 44M Syquest int. & media	£99.00	£116.32

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A4000 2Mb bases from	#	£100.00	£117.50
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A3000 / A400/1 Floppy drive	#	£12.00	£14.10
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A3000 PSU's	#	£20.00	£23.50
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Hardware Bargains		exc VAT	inc VAT
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all 2nd user items 90 days Wty

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Computer systems...............................£13 + vat
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All goods are fully guaranteed but not supplied on approval.

RISC OS portable now in production

The long awaited Riscstation portable is due off the production line within a few weeks, but will only be available to those who have placed deposits.

Although slightly later than originally planned (originally Valentines day) first shipments should commence during March.

This replacement to the long-in-the-tooth A4 differs significantly from the concept model which was announced over 2 years ago. The original laptop design has been shrunk to sub-notebook size, and many of the legacy ports such as printer, serial etc will be provided by a docking station and not available on the device itself.

Riscstation were showing off the unit, in its Magnesium Alloy case at the BETT show, although the device had a PC-based motherboard instead of its final ARM-based one.

This does not mean the device is short of on-board connectivity which is expected to include industry-standard ports such as PCMCIA, USB, and Ethernet. Riscstation are using the "standard" Simtec-based USB APIs which should mean software written for the sub notebook should also work on the USB podule and vice versa.

At 242 x 190 x 30mm, the device is small enough to fit into briefcases and bags, and with a touchscreen and touchpad there is no need to carry a mouse around with you. To put this into perspective, a Toshiba Libretto (another popular PC sub-notebook) is 210x115x34mm and an A5 sheet of paper is 210 x 148mm.

To provide support for some of the larger peripherals such as floppy and CD, the seperate docking station is required, which also gives you serial and parallel ports for connection to modems, printers and scanners.

A VGA output is provided on both the device itself and on the docking station for connection to an external monitor – useful if you wish to use resolutions over the 800 x 600 maximum of the 8.4" TFT colour screen.

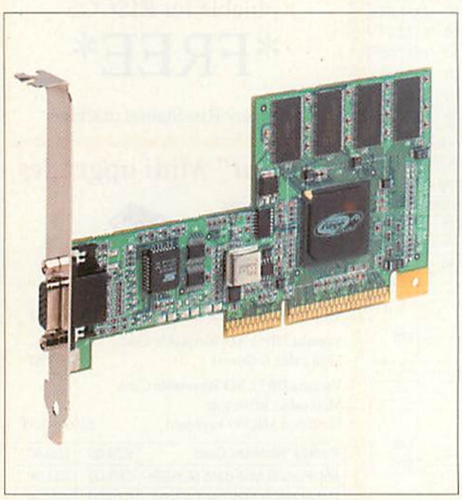
Riscstation are accepting deposits of £100 minimum to reserve your unit as the initial production run will be limited and depend on demand. To reserve your machine, send your cheque (made payable to RiscStation Ltd) to:

RiscStation Ltd
168 Elliott Street
Tyldesley
Manchester
M29 8DS

Tel: 01942 797 777
Fax: 01942 797 771
www.riscstation.co.uk
sales@riscstation.co.uk



Next generation AGP graphics card brings new graphics performance to RiscPC users



Windfall Engineering, who develop graphics hardware and software for the RISC OS market, have announced a new version of their popular AGP graphics solution, Viewfinder.

New Viewfinders will use the ATI XPert 2000 Pro AGP card. Viewfinders with the ATI XPert 98 AGP card will be discontinued, but are still available while stocks last. The former will cost 360 Euro inc. 19% VAT. The latter will cost 295 Euro inc. 19% VAT, as before. Existing users of ViewFinder can to the new AGP card for 80 Euro.

The XPert 2000 Pro version of VewFinder is capable of :

1600 x 1200 x up to 16M colours, 91 Hz
1920 x 1440 x up to 16M colours, 74 Hz
2048 x 1536 x up to 32K colours, 72 Hz
2048 x 1536 x 16M colours, 67 Hz

It has 32Mb of memory instead of 8Mb, which provides ample space for caching (and hence fast redrawing of) screen sized (or larger) desktop backdrops, even in a 2048 x 1536 x 16M colour mode.

The XPert 2000 Pro is also faster in some areas, providing extra speed as well as superior resolutions. Rectangle copy (used extensively for moving windows around the desktop ...) is 1.5 to 1.8 times as fast. Rectangle fill (the second most used operation in the desktop) is 3 to 3.4 times as fast. Other operations are somewhat faster but not by large amounts. Users of RiscPCs who have recent, big-screen monitors (17" and above) will benefit from the extra memory and speed increases in the new version of Viewfinder. The extra video memory in Viewfinder allows RiscPCs to achieve previously unheard-of display modes and is the only way to sensibly drive a modern display. With the extra memory providing more colours and larger resolution at flicker-free refresh rates, the ful power of RISC OS DTP and graphics packages is realised.

Acorn User will be carrying out a comprehensive review of the new Viewfinder graphics card which we hope to publish in the March 2002 issue.

Viewfinder is available direct from Windfall Engineering or contact your preferred RISC OS dealer.

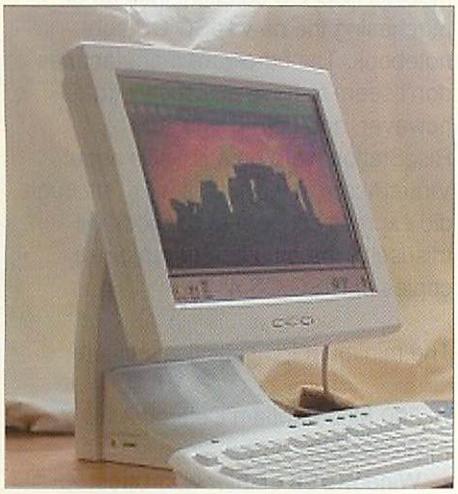
Windfall Engineering
Aawal 53
5211 PS
Den Bosch
The Netherlands

www.windfall.nl
kortink@inter.nl.net

New thin client previewed at BETT 2002

Castle and Cumana previewed their new RISC OS-based thin client known as SLYM at the BETT 2002 show last month.

Based around an ARM7500FE with a 15" LCD screen, the device is aimed at schools and colleges who wish to remove the costly and error-prone PC from the classroom, and to provide a more secure and easily-maintained way of running RISC OS, and Windows software via the Citrix client and Windows Terminal Server.



The joint Castle/Cumana stand at BETT 2002 had several SYLMs all running RISC OS 4, Oregano and the RISC OS Citrix client.

The heart of SYLM is Castle's "Neuron 100" board which is based on a shrunken A7000 motherboard. They have upped the processor speed to 66MHz and added flash-ROM to allow hard disc less operation, making the SLYM free of all moving parts and completely silent.

Interestingly, the Neuron 100 boards still retain a floppy and IDE connector (although these are unused in the SLYM) and as such its highly likely we will see faster A7000 models in the future which incorporate a Neuron-based motherboard using the faster processor. Castle are currently working on a StrongARM-based Neuron200 board, which would increase the performance of SYLM even further.

SLYM is a joint development between Castle, who created the technology, and Cumana who are marketing the device. We hope to get our hands on one soon to discover how much faster the device actually is.

If you would like to see a demonstration of SLYM, you should contact Cumana:

Cumana & Cannon Computing
Whitegate
Hatfield Heath
Bishop's Stortford
Hertfordshire
CM22 7ED
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)1279 730 800
Fax: +44 (0)1279 730 809
www.cumana.co.uk
sales@cumana.co.uk

Stream of MP3 software developments for RISC OS

The world of MP3 playing and ripping on RISC OS is moving along swiftly with several releases this month. The first is support for "Streaming MP3" where MP3 data is streamed over the internet. The most popular use of this method is for Internet Radio. John Duffell has released *Stream* which plugs the *Shoutcast* format Internet streaming technology into the already popular *AMPlayer* MP3 player.

If you're Internet bandwidth isn't quite up to streaming Internet radio, a new RISC OS port of an existing tool from Alex Macfarlane Smith allows you to digitise, or *Rip* your existing CD audio tracks into WAV, AIFC or raw 16-bit linear PCM on your hard disc. From there, these can then be converted into the MP3 format (which will take up much less space on your hard disc) and be playable with *AMPlayer*. *Cdparanoia*, along with the other software, is available for download from the URLs below.

AMPlayer itself has received a major upgrade. Now at version 1.38, several improvements have been made in this release, although many of which would be more relevant to software writers who use use *AMPlayer* as a plugin to their own software.

- Transient file playback (play back a file in the background from a single call)
- FrontEnd now supports transient playback by Control+drag
- AmpApp now functions on all machines, and should output corrected stereo.

* Improved and more extensive documentation.
* Speed ups on all versions, but most noticeable on FP (floating point) version.
* Optional decimation to improve performance on slower machines.
* Much improved stability for instance handling
* Improved * commands for controlling volume and playback.
* Fix for low frequency files.
* Fix for ID3v2 lock-ups.
* Miscallenios bugfixes and speed ups.

Stream: duffell.cjb.net

Cdparanoia:
www.archifishal.freeserve.co.uk

AMPlayer: www.amplayer.org

Introducing your News Editor

With the relaunch of the magazine there are some changes amongst the editorial staff – and your ever-alert news editor is one of them.

For those that don't know me, I'm chairman of the Association of Acorn Usergroups (AAUG). Previous to that I spent some time working for Acorn themselves, and have used Acorns since the BBC B at school. I now own a StrongARM RiscPC which sits proudly next to a Windows 2000 and XP machine at home.

Nowadays, I spend the majority of my time providing technical and development skills to large corporations and specialise in the thin-client world. I also try and keep up to speed on the Intenet, as I also run a Web hosting and design company whom you may have seen advertised in this very publication.

I welcome feedback on the type and subject of the news I report on, so if there's something you want kept up-to-date on and you think it would be of interest to others, drop me a line.

Neil Spellings
News Editor
news@acornuser.com

Commercial RISC OS emulator launched amidst contraversial debate over legality

3QD/Virtual Acorn have announced the commercial version of the Red Squirrel RISC OS emulator for the PC *VirtualA5000.*

Previewed at the Birmingham show, and shown in its release version at BETT, *VirtualA5000* is a bundle of PC ARM emulation software, RISC OS 3.11 ROM images and a RISC OS hard disc image crammed with RISC OS software - all of which allows a PC running Windows to be turned into an A5000.

VirtualAcorn claim that *VirtualA5000* runs typically 4 to 5 times the speed of Red Squirrel, and we will hopefully be able to test these claims in the near future.

VirtualAcorn also state that they have licenced RISC OS 3.11 from Pace for inclusion in the product, which means unlike the freeware version Red Squirrel, you get a fully working copy of RISC OS "out of the box" without the need to download ROM images and create a !Boot sequence.



However, this claim was disputed by RISC OS Ltd, who issued a statement to Foundation members stating that "RISCOS Ltd has the worldwide licence to the RISC Operating System for use in the Desktop Computer Market" and "no-one has a written licence to distribute any version of RISC OS for use with PC based emulators"

This is in direct contradiction to Virtual Acorn's Web site which states they have "an agreement" from Pace to distribute the RISC OS 3.11 ROM image. Whilst its still unclear on the exact licensing situation, VirtulAcorn seem confident they have at least Pace's permission to ship the RISC OS 3.11 ROM image, even if, as RISC OS Ltd state, they don't actually have a legal written license.

Whilst this debate continues, there is a seperate discussion as to whether the release is of benefit or detriment to the RISC OS market. Many RISC OS users who are forced to use Windows at work are praising the release, as it allows the use of RISC OS in areas which wouldn't normally be possible. It also allows RISC OS to move into previously unchartered territories and markets for people who cannot afford ARM-based hardware on which to run it.

Others, however, point to possible victims of the release such as Riscstations' new sub-notebook, where people who already own a PC laptop may opt for the VirtualAcorn approach to get a mobile RISC OS solution, instead of purchasing the new RISC OS sub-notebook. The hardware manufactures don't seem to have any such worries, however, and both Castle and RiscStation were both positive about VirtualAcorn in its current form, although did express concern about possible misuse of the emulator to run pirate copies of RISC OS 4.

The minimum PC specifications are:

- 300 Mhz Pentium/Celeron/AMD processor.
- Windows 98 or later with Direct X.
- 64Mb of RAM.
- 300Mb of free hard drive space.
- Three button mouse (almost all scroll mice have three buttons).
- 8Mb Graphics card with hardware 2D acceleration and DirectX support.

3QD
86 Turnberry
Home Farm
Bracknell
Berks
RG12 8ZH

Plea for programmers to join AcornICQ developers team as AOL change ICQ protocols

Maarten Bezemer has issued a statement regarding the future of the RISC OS ICQ client, *AcornICQ*. Maarten states that "Maybe some people have noticed, but *AcornICQ* doesn't function well anymore. ICQ [has been] taken over by AOL and now they have changed the protocol drastically."

He goes on to say that ICQ no longer fully supports the old protocols. Effectively, this means that the rules the software follows to communicate with the ICQ network have been changed. Because of this, it is currently only possible for *AcornICQ* users to login and send messages, with all other functions now being unusable (due to the changes to the protocols).

The statement continues, saying that the *AcornICQ* developers "have decided to recreate aICQ from scratch and build an advance plugin system so it would be easy for everyone to create new functions for aICQ."

Currently, the team is brainstorming for ideas. They are looking for more programmers to contribute to development of *AcornICQ*. Because they are writing a new program from scratch, now is the ideal time for new programmers to join the effort. Maarten urges coders to join and help rebuild *AcornICQ* to give us all an up-to-date client which will be fully compatible with the latest protocols.

We urge any programmers with a little spare time to pay heed to this plea. *AcornICQ* is an essential Internet tool and without doubt one of the most important RISC OS software developments that keeps the platform viable for Internet use.

AcornICQ development is co-ordinated world-wide through sourceforge.net, which allows ideas and source code to be shared amongst registered developers.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the *AcornICQ* team, email: **acornicq-users@lists.sourceforge.net** so you could become a developer!

sourceforge.net/projects/acornicq

Python 2.2 now available for RISC OS computers

Dietmar Schwertberger has announced the immediate availability of the binaries of *Python 2.2* for RISC OS. The files are available as a free download from **www.schwertberger.de/python.html**.

RISC OS *Python* includes the following highlights:

- An integrated interface to the SWI system
- Drawfile support
- Interfaces to the RISC OS WIMP and toolbox (with examples)
- Numeric and plotting extensions

For use of *Python* you will need a filing system with long filenames and support for more than 77 files in a directory.

What is Python?

Python is an interpreted, object-oriented, high-level programming language with dynamic semantics. Its high-level built-in data structures, combined with dynamic typing and dynamic binding, make it very attractive for rapid application development, as well as for use as a scripting or glue language to connect existing components together. Python's simple, easy-to-learn syntax emphasises readability and therefore reduces the cost of program maintenance. *Python* supports modules and packages, which encourages program modularity and code reuse. The *Python* interpreter and the extensive standard library are available in source or binary form without charge for all major platforms, and can be freely distributed.

Often, programmers fall in love with *Python* because of the increased productivity it provides. Since there is no compilation step, the edit-test-debug cycle is incredibly fast. Debugging *Python* programs is easy: a bug or bad input will never cause a segmentation fault. Instead, when the interpreter discovers an error, it raises an exception. When the program doesn't catch the exception, the interpreter prints a stack trace.

A source-level debugger allows inspection of local and global variables, evaluation of arbitrary expressions, setting breakpoints, stepping through the code a line at a time, and so on. The debugger is written in *Python* itself, testifying to *Pythons* introspective power. On the other hand, often the quickest way to debug a program is to add a few print statements to the source: the fast edit test-debug cycle makes this simple approach very effective.

Full information is available from the official *Python* Web site (see below). Acorn User welcomes any comments you may have on this language.

Official Python site:
www.python.org

RISC OS Python:
www.schwertberger.de/python.html

Back-up your photos and data with low cost CD media

With last month's look at digital cameras, many of you will have been happily snapping away at family, friends, pets, your RiscPC, strangers in the street etc showing off your fancy new digital camera.

If all your wonderful David Bailey-esq snaps are taking up too much disc space, why not burn them onto CD to save disc space? You can transport several thousand of them easily to other PCs, and you'll have a permanent copy which wont fade over time.

Luckily, CDR Supplies Direct have a low cost range of CD and CDR media to suite your requirements. Combine this with one of the excellent RISC OS CD Burning packages available, and you've an excellent archival system for your photos. You can even extend this to your data and software - CDRs make a great backup medium!

See the CDR Supplies Direct advert in this issue for more pricing and contact details.

RISC OS CD Burning packages are available from Castle, RiscStation and all good RISC OS dealers.

Castle: www.castle.uk.co

RiscStation: www.riscstation.co.uk

In brief

SASAUG meeting

On February 11th Chris Hornby of Photodesk will be talking about his new range of Cannon digital cameras, Smartmedia readers and progress on the USB card. The latest printers will be reviewed together with appropriate Photodesk *Photoreal* printer drivers. For the meeting location, check out **www.aaug.net**

Find your ancestors

Modern technology has given Britons a glimpse of life at the turn of the last century with the online publication of the national census for 1901.

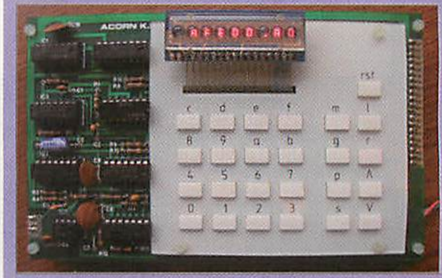
The census was conducted a few weeks after the death of Queen Victoria as Britain was beginning a new era under the rule of King Edward VII. "The database contains details of over 32 million individuals," a spokeswoman for the Public Records Office said. "It is a snapshot of the family at the time — ages, place of birth, occupations, and also...who else was in the household at the time." At the time of writing, the census site, at **www.census.pro.gov.uk** was down for a weeks worth of maintenance, having been brought to its knees only days after release because of overwhelming demand.

New Palmlink software

David Breakwell has released a first for RISC OS users - the ability to transfer files to and from the popular PalmPilot handheld. The software uses the Palm cradle via the serial port, and can also convert RISC OS text files to the Palm "DOC" format. *!PalmLink* can be downloaded from David's Web site at **www.argonet.co.uk/users/davidb/**

Old news?

If you are interested in a piece of history, Mike Cowlishaw has created a Web site dedicated to the first ever Acorn Microcomputer. If you're thinking "BBC



Micro" at this point you're sadly mistaken - the first ever Acorn computer was the System 1. Sporting a 1MHz 6502 processor, 1K of RAM, hexadecimal output, and a rather bizarre keyboard, the system 1 could be yours in kit form for a mere £70.20 (in 1979 of course!)

http://www.cary.demon.co.uk/acorn

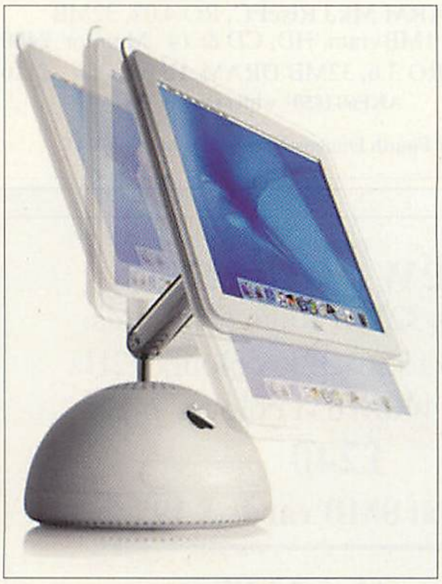
Apple unveils SLYM-style iMac

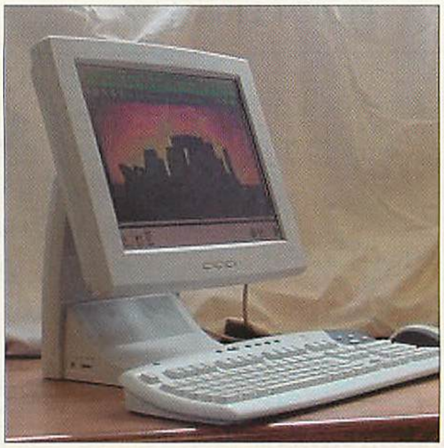
We note with interest Apple has unveiled a radical new design for its popular iMac desktop computer along the lines of Castle's SLYM. The design squeezes the guts of the machine into a domed base sprouting a futuristic flat-screen monitor. The new iMac will be priced between £980 and £1,400 depending on model and spec. There is a choice of three new iMac models: the 800MHz iMac with DVD-R/CD-RW SuperDrive, the 700MHz iMac with DVD ROM/CD-RW Combo drive or the 700MHz iMac with CD-RW drive. All models ship with the NVIDIA GeForce2 MX graphics processing unit for photorealistic games and spectacular 3D graphics.

The main difference between the devices is that SLYM is aimed at the thin client world, whereas Apple's offering is a full-blown computer. Apple managed to get the only model in the county onto their stand at BETT where the new iMac running a PC Emulator running VirtualAcorn was considered in a less-busy moment!

Apple UK: www.apple.com/uk

Cumana: www.cumana.co.uk





Researchers claim data compression breakthrough

A research company called ZeoSync said it has achieved a breakthrough that overcomes the previously known limits of compression related to the storage and transmission of data. The company is a research start-up working with a team of renowned mathematicians. ZeoSync's breakthrough, which has yet to be demonstrated in any public forum, could vastly boost the ability of computer disks to store all types of information including text, music, and video. Their initial claims were dampened when some of the mathematicians who ZeoSync claimed they were working with denied any knowledge of the breakthrough.

If proven and successfully commercialised, the discovery could overturn 50 years of thinking in the field of "lossless" data compression and undermine business assumptions on which the telecommunications and other digital industries are based.

Lossless compression is the process by which computer data can be compacted, stored, and then restored with complete fidelity, or zero loss of data.

Algorithms such as LZW are currently the widest used form of lossless compression. Other existing compression techniques such as JPEG and MPEG typically shed redundant data in order to conserve space.

We wonder whether we'll be seeing a *!Spark2003* from Mr Pilling if this technology exists and eventually takes off?

ZeoSync Corporation

In brief

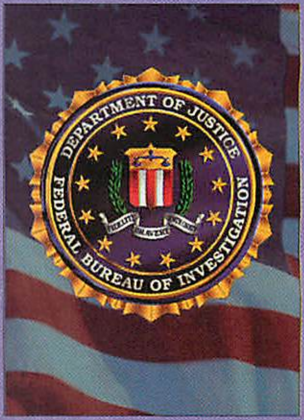
Computer chips could thwart euro currency fraud

The first counterfeit euro note has been found already — a 50-euro note. The European Central Bank is considering adding computer chips to future generations of euro notes to allow police to track stolen money and to stop counterfeiters. The technology is not currently used because of the cost and suggestions that it might not stand up to the battering it would get if inserted in money. However, the large value of the 500 and 200 euro notes and their attractiveness to criminals could make the incorporation of the chips economically viable. Now which low-cost, low power processor core do we know that would be ideal for such a role?

EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK
together with the national central banks of the euro area

FBI reviews software

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation has reversed its advice for computer users trying to protect themselves against security flaws in Microsoft *Windows XP*. Applying a free fix from Microsoft works after all, the FBI concluded. Not sure how long the FBI have been reviewing software for - perhaps someone should send them a copy of RISC OS?



This was one in a string of security related issues with Microsofts' latest flagship OS - *Windows XP*. Serious security flaws have now been discovered in the plug and play support, web browser and email software. Perhaps someone should send them a copy of RISC OS!

acornuser.com to be relaunched

By the time you are reading this issue, the Acorn User Web site should have been relaunched. Melotech is now developing the Web site, with extra developments already underway.

Acorn User: www.acornuser.com
Melotech: www.melotech.co.uk

Neil Spellings
news@acornuser.com

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WIMP Basic II	£100	£60

Word Processors / DTP

	Original Price	Offer Price
Textease Multimedia	£100	£60
Textease Studio	£175	£115
ARC WORLD CD with Impression Junior	—	£5
Startwrite by Icon Technologies	£58	£10
First Page	£61	£40
Pendown (Talking)	£63	£40
Fireworkz Pro	£175	£135

Drawing / ClipArt / Viewers / Other

	Original Price	Offer Price
PhotoLink	£69	£50
PDSView	£117	£20
Photodesk FX1 (Effects)	£20	£12
Top Model II	£153	£75
Top Model CD Collection 1	£35	£20
Draw Works New Millennium	£60	£35
Acorn Replay Starter Kit	£41	£15

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	Original Price	Offer Price
Crystal Rain Forest 2: Mission Control FD	£53	£35
Naughty Stories Vols. 1 & 2 (set of 12) on CD	£70	£50
Sherlock Holmes CD	£30	£15
Acorn Explorer Training Manual and Disc	—	£5
King Arthur By CSH	£59	£20†
Doris the Dotty Dog (Disc only)	—	£5†
Darryl the Dragon (4Mation)	£23	£5†
A Mouse in Holland	£35	£10†
Tiny Art (Topologika)	£42	£10†
Kiyeko with Acorn Reader	£36	£25
Graph IT. age 8-16+	£41	£20
Illustrated Shakespeare CD	£30	£20†
Playdays	£26	£13†
Goldilocks OAK/Cumana	£47	£20

Games

	Original Price	Offer Price
Die Speccy Games CD + Spectrum Z80 emulator	£39	£20
Syndicate+ CD	£32	£22†
Alone in the Dark	£35	£15†
Global Effect	£30	£15†
Simon the Sorcerer CD	£46	£20†
Games Pad Dual Pro	£40	£20†

Whilst stocks last. Minimum order £10, UK post included, please enquire for overseas delivery cost. Please check for compatibility. Please quote "Special offer price" when ordering.

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RISC OS SELECT

Make the right choice for the future with

RISC OS Select

Keep up to date with every new version of RISC OS as it appears!

In future, new updates to RISC OS will be soft-loaded over the existing RISC OS 4 ROM. Distribution will be on CD and via the Internet, making regular updates and the widespread testing of new features far more practical. Join **Select** to be a part of the new scheme and receive up to three RISC OS update CDs per year. All you will need is one or more RISC OS 4 machines on which to install new versions of RISC OS 4.



What does the Select scheme provide?

By joining **Select** you will receive the following benefits:

1. Up to three CDs per year, containing the latest version of RISC OS plus optional beta-test copies of software components in development. Every CD will also be bootable and contain a full, working disc image that allows the easy selection of different boot sequences.
2. Access to interim updates via a private Web site.
3. The ability to upgrade up to **ten** machines at a single site. **Select** is a personal scheme: you only need one subscription even if you own several computers. However, RISC OS 4 is needed for each machine: **Select** cannot be used with RISC OS 3·7 or earlier.
4. **Affiliate Registered Developer** status: if you are a programmer, joining **Select** entitles you to become a Registered Developer for no extra charge, and have your products included in the Database section of **Foundation RISC User** magazine (see below).

RISC OS 4 upgrades and Select scheme prices

Subscriptions to **Select** are available on an annual basis, and may be purchased in combination with a RISC OS 4 upgrade.

RISC OS 4 upgrade plus Select subscription:	**£179**
RISC OS 4 upgrade only *(new low price!)*:	**£109**
Select subscription only: *(for existing RISC OS 4 users)*	**£105**
Select subscription only: *(for Foundation members)*	**£99**
Select group subscription: *(for sites with more than ten machines)*	**£300**

All prices above include VAT.

Please see our Web site for further pricing details, overseas prices etc.

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FOUNDATION RISC User



Now in volume 2!

Foundation RISC User is a truly innovative publication from RISCOS Ltd that supports the heart of the RISC OS market. The magazine articles combine useful information with software resources that can be launched with a simple click on a link. Every issue is packed with a wide range of substantial and authoritative features from respected writers, along with a comprehensive and fully integrated database of current RISC OS products, developers and user groups. Altogether, it's arguably the most innovative and high quality CD magazine on any platform.

Testimonials from readers of Foundation RISC User

- "The interface is very friendly and better than my perception of what a CD-based magazine would be like!"—*Andrew Weston*
- "The whole CD is a joy, and something our platform can be proud of."—*Geoff Steeper*
- "The Foundation CD has contradicted my opinion that I wouldn't be able to read a CD magazine happily. It's very nicely laid out."—*Fred Bambrough*
- "Congratulations on Foundation RISC User… it works smoothly, looks good and has masses of useful and interesting content."—*Gavin Wraith*
- "Keep up the excellent work! (And what I REALLY appreciate is someone who can write, spell, talk sense, and knows his its-es and it's-es!)"—*Jeremy Roberts*
- "It's a really excellent job."—*David Pilling*

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New wires-only ADSL to bring broadband Internet to RISC OS.

Will 2002 be the year that Broadband finally takes off in the UK? Monthly charges are set to fall as "Wires-only" ADSL trials have already begun, and BT Wholesale launch the DIY installation no-engineer-visit version of ADSL in January at a price to ISPs of £25 per month for the 50:1 contention ratio 512Kbps service.

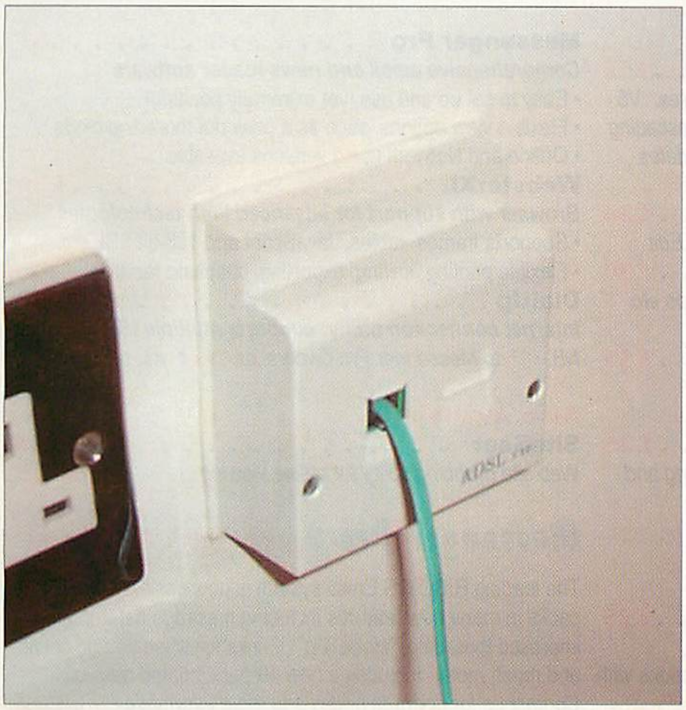
Subscribers to the DIY-install service are able to choose and pay for their own ADSL USB or Ethernet-connected modem/router, which is mostly good news for RISC OS users who won't want to buy a PC gateway just to get USB ADSL Internet access.

The only practical difference is that the work to add ADSL to your voice phone line for "wires-only" is all done at the exchange. There is no visit by a BT Engineer to install the ADSL filter box to separate the ADSL data from the normal voice signal on your phone line. Instead you have to purchase a "micro-filter" to be fitted at each extension socket where you want to connect a phone. The ADSL connection is effectively the un-filtered signal coming out from the master socket. What BT don't shout about is that you can usually get away with just one micro-filter arranged so that it feeds the rest of your phone extension sockets.

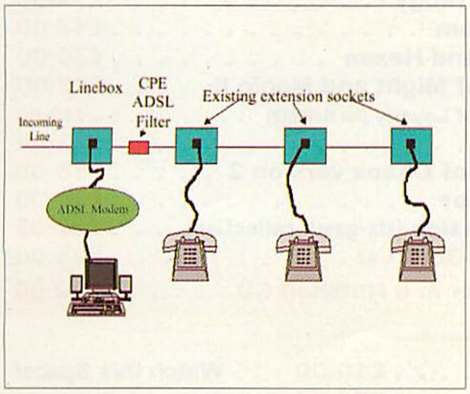
One highly thought-of ADSL-supplying ISP, Andrews and Arnold (**aa.nu/isp/wiresonly.html**), say that they will be able to supply the same master socket face-plate filter/splitter box to feed to the extensions that a BT engineer would have fitted, making the installation even neater for subscribers with practical wiring skills.

You can read the BT Suppliers Information Notes (SIN) about ADSL Microfilters at **www.sinet.bt.com/346v2p1.pdf**

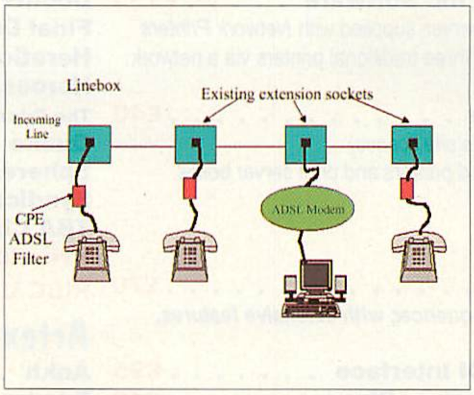
Many ISPs offering "wires-only" ADSL want you to buy the ADSL modem/router they supply as part of the package. It's worth reading up about available modems in the ADSL FAQs around, such as the G.DMT "Wires-only" FAQ from ADSLGuide.org.uk at **www.adslguide.org.uk/qanda.asp?faq=GDMT**



Transform your Internet connection with ADSL.



BT: Please buy a £20 filter for each socket...



Me: No thanks, I'll just have one!

In brief

Rosemary's Baby

Rosemary Miskin has been writing Acorn software for many years. An enthusiastic user of the Argonet *Voyager* Internet suite, Rosemary offers a number of Voyager enhancements and utilities, as well as a wealth of other Acorn software from Graphics to Genealogy. Her latest baby is *!ColDef2* which allows you to choose colours for Web page authoring using the Acorn colour-picker module. Colour formats supported are RISC OS, HTML and the 216-colour "Netsafe" range. Pick a colour and drag and drop its parameter value from *ColDef2* to a text editor window or into *ArtWorks*. The display shows the RGB levels in decimal, hex and percentage, and usefully any colour already on-screen can be copied into *ColDef2*.

www.argonet.co.uk/users/miskin/net/main.html#cd

Bablake Junior ICT

Gary Locock is Year 5 Form Teacher and Information Technology Network Manager at Bablake Junior School in Coventry, Warwickshire. His remit covers 48 computers used by up to 192 pupils, and each person in the school whether staff or child has a private e-mail address for use without restriction in-school or worldwide. Pupils are encouraged to make e-mail penpal friendships in other countries and the school's emphasis on RISC OS machines guarantees immunity from *Windows* virus infections. Gary's admirable vision is that the acquisition of ICT skills will be pleasurable, and as natural and as equally important as talking or writing.

www.bablakejs.co.uk/ictinf.html

Fingers Fletcher

Justin Fletcher is a busy man these days, but still finds time to release freeware RISC OS goodies. His *!JFinger* application uses the "finger" protocol to get information from remote Internet servers. Justin says that other finger applications he'd used were so pathetic that he decided to write his own. *JFinger* has a lot of bells and whistles that you might never use, but as a quick tool to find how much mail you have waiting, or to see who's logged in to a particular server, *JFinger* may point you in the right direction.

www.movspclr.co.uk/software.html#jfinger

David Dade
comms@acornuser.com

Web graphics: cream of the crop?

Last month we took a brief look at the three main commercial vector graphics packages available for RISC OS: *Vantage*, *ArtWorks* and *Draw Works 3rd Millenium*. Obviously, it's not appropriate to compare *DW3M*, which costs £39, to *Vantage*, which costs £240. One is a professional solution, the other a budget solution. Therefore, we'll simply take a look at the pros and cons of each package, starting this month with Cerilica's *Vantage*.

As mentioned last month, *Vantage* is well established as a print design package; there's no questioning it's abilities in this field. However, those who read the Drobe review will also be aware of *Vantage's* excellent anti-aliasing engine, which renders bitmaps with breath-taking sharpness. This quality makes it the ideal package for creating graphics for the Internet, at least in terms of output. Here we will look at it's usability and features.

On my Kinetic RiscPC (233Mhz), *Vantage* loads within around three seconds; it's not much slower on lesser machines, either. This is somewhat impressive for such an advanced piece of software. Clicking on the *Vantage* icon (on the iconbar) brings up a pleasingly uncluttered workspace; the interface has been designed to be as unobtrusive as possible, which is just the ticket for design work.

At this point, we need to ask "what is needed in the average Web site?". Well, for a corporate site (which is what we'll concentrate on here) you need a logo and, often, images for the navigation menu. This determined, that is what I will create in *Vantage*. The first thing to do is create the company logo; I thought of a name and line of business, so now I need a suitable logo. In this case I have decided to keep it stylish but simple; three different coloured stars, overlayed and slightly offset, with the company name next to them in black. This company has a slogan so that needs to be incorporated somehow, as well.

Creating a star shape in *Vantage* is very easy, as you'd expect. One simply selects the shapes toolbar, clicks on the star shape and click-and-drag. Now I have my star, but it's only a black outline; I want colour. To fill this shape with colour, one drags the appropriate colour (in this case cyan at 60%) to the Fill Colour tab. To change the outline to the same colour, but a little darker (for emphasis), select Cyan at 100% and drag it to the Line Colour tab. Perfect result, out star is now in colour. I want three of these, but in different colours, so the next thing to do is copy and paste the shape twice. This is achieved using the usual CTRL+C and CTRL+V shortcuts, then the colours are changed in each copy using exactly the same method as for the original. To overlay the three stars, simple drag and drop is employed.

The text in the logo is a simple enough matter; it has to be clear and simple. Selecting the text tool, the company name is entered and then dragged to size and manually aligned. The same method is used for the slogan. To right align these, one selects both text lines and then applies alignment to the right, using the toolbar button. We now have a simple but pleasing logo, but there's something missing. Whenever there's something missing, it always helps to try a little transparency. Applying 80% transparency does the trick (a simple matter of selecting the stars and then going to the transparency tool and dragging the 80% block to the transparency tab) and we now have a stylish company logo.

In our phantom Web site, the menu system will be on the left of the site and be made up of white text on a blue background. To create the image for this is a simple matter of drawing a large, blue rectangle and adding the text to it, using the methods described previously. We now have all of the graphics created so now it's time to output a bitmap image of everything. *Vantage* can output as a sprite, PNG or TIFF. PNG is the Internet graphics format, so that's what we'll use here.

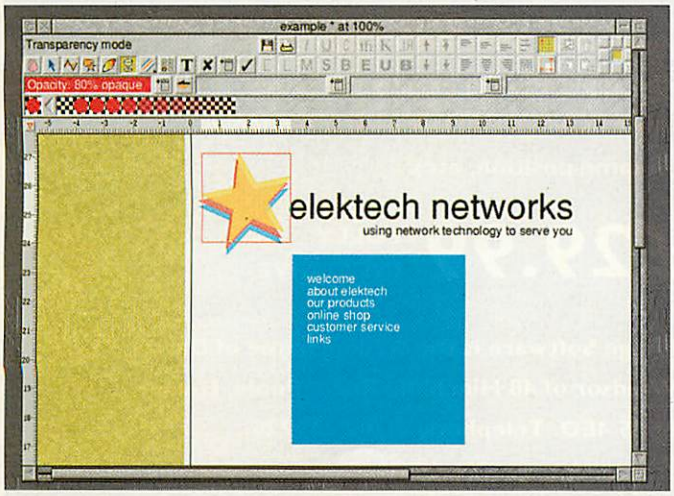


Final PNG output (also available online).

To output only a select area of the page, one has to crop this area by resizing the Vantage window so that only what you want to save is displayed. Once you've done this, it's a simple matter of saving out via the standard menu, selecting PNG and saving in the standard RISC OS manner. The output is superb, as shown in the screenshot. Readers with access to the Internet can see the output file by visiting **www.acornuser.com /graphics**.

Those used to *ArtWorks* will find the *Vantage* interface quite a change, but it is very intuitive. I created the logo and navigation images in just a few minutes. The output is top class; Cerilica are spot-on with their anti-aliasing engine. This all comes at a price, of course. At £240, *Vantage* is the most expensive graphics package available for RISC OS and £100 more than *ArtWorks Master Edition*, its nearest RISC OS rival. It is, however, extremely cheap compared to similar packages on *MacOS* and *Windows*. If you can afford it or need professional output for the Web, *Vantage* is a must. If you want professional publishing capabilities as well, then *Vantage* suddenly becomes amazingly good value for money as you've basically got a two-in-one solution.

Next month we'll take a look at *ArtWorks Master Edition*.

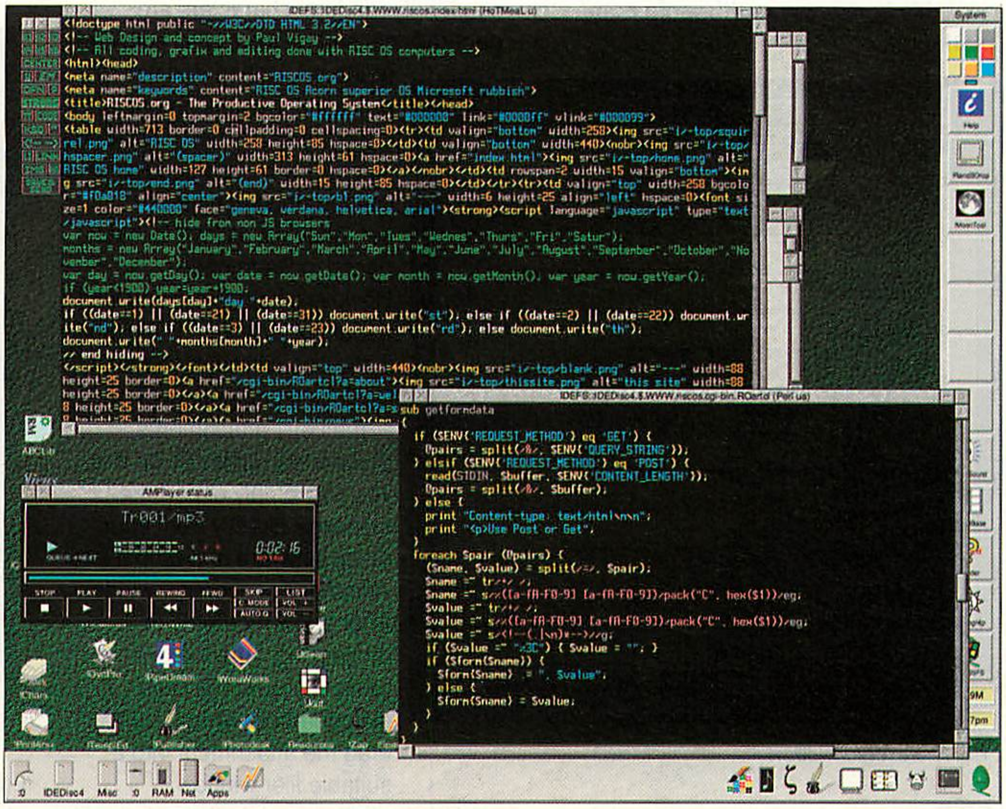


The work in progress (Transparency tool in use).

Michael Stubbs
graphics@acornuser.com

Essential Public Domain and Shareware software.

After a few months absence, I'm back with a new look magazine and new editor - good luck to Michael and his team. As it's also a new year as well, I thought I'd give a quick round up of some of what are, in my opinion, some of the essential applications of any RISC OS PD and Shareware collection.



Zap at work with HTML and Perl.

Zap

First and foremost, must come *Zap* - which is so integral to my system I wonder how I ever lived without it. Indeed, there is nothing on any platform that comes anywhere close to it in terms of flexibility, versatility or usability. *Zap* is a text editor, initially designed to replace the default Acorn offering, *!Edit* - but replacing *Edit* is a bit of an understatement for *Zap* can do virtually anything bar making tea, and I'm sure with a suitable module could even manage that!

Of course, talking about text editors in some places will trigger a war to rival some of Bin Laden's efforts, as editors seem to be very personal things, which is odd as they all essentially allow you to edit text files and documents. However, it's how they do it that counts, and *Zap* not only does it in style, but does it with a 1001 styles, a point which invariably puts off some people from trying it, fearing a huge learning curve and 1000's of configuration options and settings.

Don't be put off though, as you can simply install *Zap* and start using it with it's default settings. The beauty lies in discovering all the additional features and functionality that will have you wondering how you ever survived without it, after about a week of use.

Whereas *Edit* merely allows you to edit text modes with a minimum of features, *Zap* incorporates colour syntax coding, fully flexible and configurable word and line wrapping, key macros, regular expression based search and replace, spell checking, completely customisable screen display utilising either RISC OS's outline fonts or its own mono-spaced bitmapped fonts (with enough styles to keep you occupied for hours just browsing through them), disc and memory editing, memory disassembly and a host of other features.

One of the most powerful features of it is that of 'modes' - or the ability to edit different types of file with its own customisable range of settings, colours and text parameters, so for example you could use it to compose your email messages, automatically colour-coding replies, signatures and quoting levels, switch between different signature, add random tag lines, word wrap at 76 characters, spell check and even cater for different users to have different preferences, yet in another window you could edit a !Help file or debug some programming code - each with keyword colouring and individual width and wrap settings.

Programmers particularly have become attached to *Zap*, purely because it offers them so much flexibility and customisation, in addition to specific modes for all popular programming languages and modules.

I can't really give it justice in a short feature such as this, without sacrificing space for other applications. Download a copy from **www.zap.uk.eu.org** and see for yourself. Also see *StrongED*, available from **www.stronged.iconbar.com**

ChangeFSI

Originally written by Acorn and given away free with all new computers is another essential utility, which is easy to overlook, simply because it too easily gets taken for granted. However, anyone who has viewed JPEG, GIF or other images downloaded from other platforms, will have no doubt come into contact with *ChangeFSI*, even if unaware of it. Not only will it convert all manner of weird and wonderful graphic files so that RISC OS users can view them, but it also has a range of powerful image manipulation features, such as re-scaling, gamma correction, pre-sharpening and other effects, but it can also save out in JPEG format.

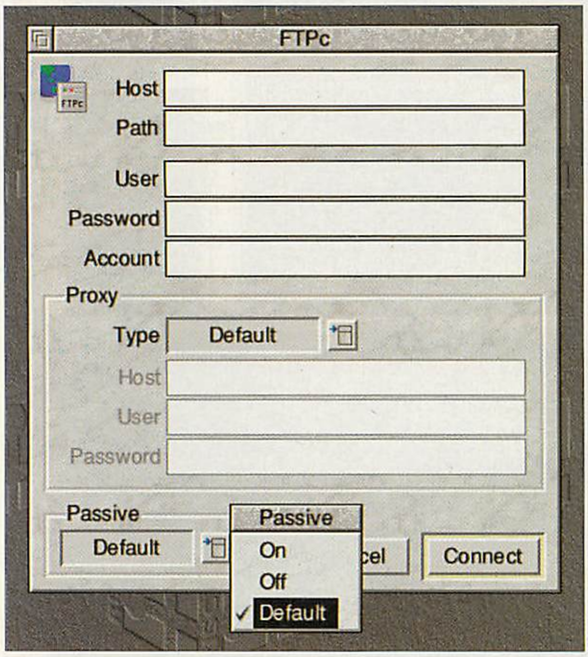
Although not the fastest image viewer available, it is one of the most accurate that I've found, coping with dithering and colour translations that some other similar utilities can cut corners on. The latest



ChangeFSI: JPEG to Sprite conversion

version (available to *RISC OS 4* and *RISC OS Select* users) also caters for some of the newer varieties of JPEG images, such as those downloaded from digital cameras and web sites.

Also see *Translatr*, available from **web.inter.nl.net/users/J.Kortink/software.htm** and *FYEO2*, available from **www.multimania.com/mathevet**.



The FTPc login window

FTPc

This time an essential utility for anyone who manages Web sites or downloads files from Internet FTP sites. This is another one of those utilities that I've found no equivalent to on other computer platforms, especially with the ease of use and reliability that *FTPc* offers.

FTPc is a freeware FTP client by Colin Granville. Just enter a hostname, username and password and *FTPc* will display a listing of files from the remote server in a RISC OS-style filer window. From then on you can simply drag and drop files either to or from *FTPc* in order to transfer your files to or from the remote server.

FTPc also contains easy to use configuration options which will allow users to work from behind firewalls, set the type of server or even change access permissions on remote files - essential if you want to make files read, write or executable.

It also incorporates a flexible hotlist which can store all your regular host locations, even including your username, password and default filepath if you require.

FTPc is available to download from **www.ftpc.iconbar.com**.

Attacher

This is another essential Internet utility and will be invaluable to anyone who receives e-mails which supposedly contain an attachment of some sort, but in reality contain nothing but lines and lines of gobbledegook.

The lines of strange looking, seemingly random, characters are generally caused by the e-mail software at the originating end not encoding the attachment into e-mail format correctly. The usual culprit is a certain popular email client produced by that company we all love to hate, based in Redmond! However, help is at hand with the aid of *Attacher*. Put simply, it can scan through all the confusing gobbledegook and extract any attachments embedded within. To do this, you can simply export the message directly from your email software and drop it into *Attacher's* conversion window. After a few moments of processing, *Attacher* will present you with a save dialogue from which you can drag the attachment into a suitable filer window.

Attacher will scan right through the file, so if there is more than one attachment embedded in the message, it should find the others too; simply drag each one out, one at a time.

Of course, the ideal solution would be to educate the masses that their email software is broken - but in the meantime, *Attacher* will remove the hassle from getting your attachments back. Written by John Allen, you can download a copy from his Web site at **johnallen.com/soft.html**.

PlaySound

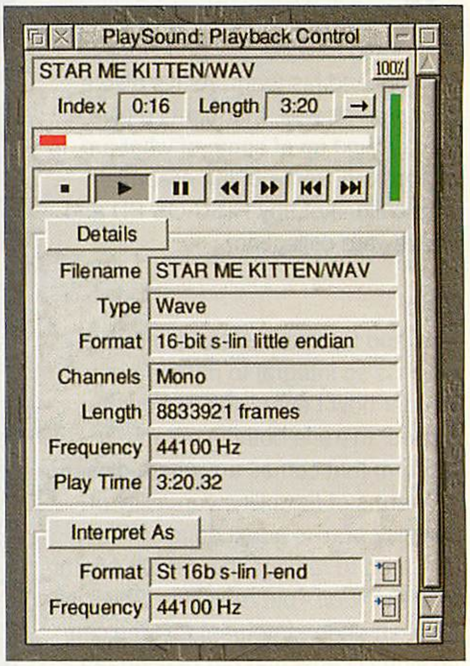
This invaluable utility is a front-end to Rick Hudson's *PlayIt* module and is the audio equivalent of *ChangeFSI*. It can be used to play a variety of sound files downloaded from the internet and imported from other computer systems. It will convert and play raw WAV files, Armadeus, Audio IFF, AudioWorks, Amiga, DataVox and a variety of other audio formats.

Like *ChangeFSI*, if it's 'seen' when you boot up the computer, then you only have to double-click on the relevant foreign file in order for it to play the file.

Control is via a standard 'video recorder' style, play/forward/backward/stop etc control panel. *PlaySound* is available to download from **www.markscholes.freeserve.co.uk/software.html**

PlayIt is available to download from **homepages.ihug.co.nz/~rhudson/software/playit.html**

This makes an ideal compliment to *PlayIt/PlaySound* and is an audio MPEG



PlaySound control panel (set to full size)

(MP3) player. Not only does it provide high quality playback of MP3 files downloaded from the net, but also has my personal favourite front-end display panel - being basic but stylish.

AMPlayer

It only has rudimentary playlist facilities, but you can auto-queue files so that it will play each MP3 file in a directory in a sequential order - which is pretty much how I listen to my music anyway. It will adequately multi-task on a StrongARM machine so that you can continue using the machine whilst you listen to your MP3s playing. *AMPlayer* is available to download from **www.amplayer.org**.

If you have an application which you



AMPlayer in action

think is essential to your enjoyment and productivity using RISC OS, please contact me and I'll see if I can feature it in future columns. As always, you can find most RISC OS applications from my comprehensive links database at **www.riscos.org/links**.

Paul Vigay
pd@acornuser.com

Castle Technology's Internet Odyssey

Ever since the announcement of the Omega well over a year ago, most talk in the RISC OS press has been about faster processors, new motherboards and better graphics. Some people have been putting off buying a new computer for months now, patiently awaiting the arrival of something better than the hardware available now. Owners of RiscPCs, A7000s, RiscStations and Micos have good reason; the only viable upgrades here are a Kinetic card or StrongARM / RISC OS 4 bundle. A great number of people, however, are still using pre-RiscPC machines. Some of these people do not want to invest in a RiscPC as they see it as being superceded with a new generation of machines in the near future; some simply can't stretch to the asking price of a RiscPC.

A lot of users of legacy machines do not require even the power of a StrongARM RiscPC, hence the reason why some have chosen not to upgrade. It is undeniable, though, that pre-RiscPC machines are not really suitable for modern applications such as DTP and the Internet. Things have moved on and even these basic tasks now push the older machines to their limits and often they simply can't cope.

What is needed, then, is a low/mid-range computer that is powerful enough to deal comfortably with every day computing tasks, yet without the unwanted expense of a high-end machine. The solution lies in the ARM 7500 FE-based computers and here is where the competition is in the RISC OS market. Castle Technology, RiscStation and MicroDigital all produce machines based around the ARM 7500 FE chip, which runs at 56MHz. Interestingly, each manufacturer seems to aim their particular machine at slightly different markets, with Castle Technology aiming squarely at the Education market and RiscStation touting their machines as suitable for high-end use. MicroDigital claim that the Mico was created as a test bed for the technology behind the yet-to-appear Omega computer and, for the moment at least, appear to have stopped actively promoting the product at any particular area of the market, so we'll assume that it is a general-purpose machine.

For a lot of people, a computer is used to write letters, do a little DTP and connect to the Internet. They don't require any more than that. A lot of RISC OS users are enthusiasts and programmers, but there are thousands who just want this general, basic use of a computer and choose RISC OS because of it's oft-discussed strengths. In light of all this, Acorn User is embarking on a short series of reviews of ARM 7500 FE-based computers; one from each manufacturer. We've not set a price point or a specification, but do ask that the machine is specifically an Internet machine and that it comes with a 15" LCD display (eliminates any flicker). It has been made clear that price is an important factor and should be balanced with specifications.

We start our series this issue with the A7000+ Odyssey Surf from Castle Technology. Next month we will look at RiscStation's offering and after that, we hope to have a Mico to review. We'll then summarise the pros and cons of each system the following issue.

The parcel that arrived from Castle Technology can only be described as huge. Upon opening this box, it was revealed that it contained two other boxes (one with the computer in, one with the LCD display in) which were well protected with immense amounts of those little pieces of polystyrene. Definitely a good start; Castle obviously know the importance of good packing. The top box was the LCD box; what a shock the size of it was! The box depth was approximately a hand-span, which is quite impressive when you consider the size of conventional monitors. The LCD itself, which was well-packed, was light and pleasingly shallow in depth. The box underneath was a conventional RiscPC box and, upon opening it, contained the usual cardboard tray with manual, keyboard, mouse and leads. On this occasion there was also an external 56K modem, as this is an Internet machine.

Unpacking and connecting up the machine takes just 10 minutes. Not bad at all; this is what setting up a computer should be like. Being an experienced computer user, I didn't have to refer to the manual. However, there is a comprehensive section detailing how to setup the machine correctly, which inexperienced computer users would find useful. Once nice touch that some PC companies sometimes have is to include a separate sheet of instructions for setting up a machine. Maybe something to include in the future (the Welcome Guide doesn't mention connecting up the modem, for example).

Castle supply a slightly updated version of Acorn's *A7000+ Welcome Guide*, which includes the afore-mentioned setup instructions. Overall, this is an excellent guide to using the machine and the RISC operating system,

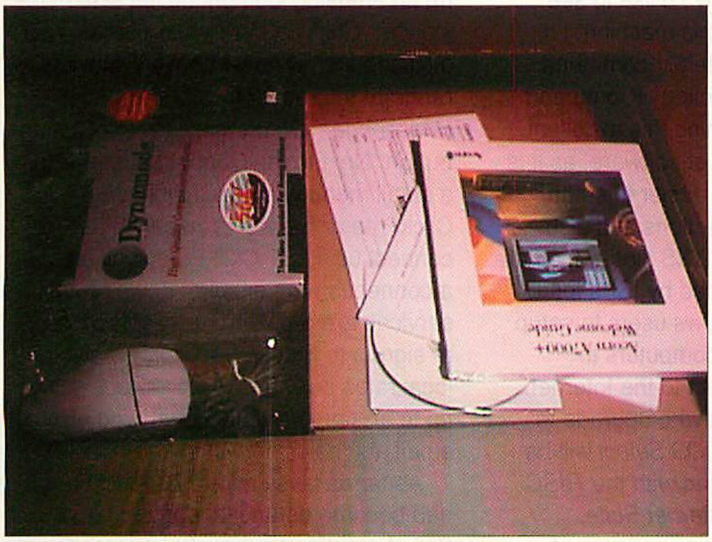


fig i: everything is neatly and adequately packaed



fig ii: the computer set up in the front room!

but there are several things that could do with being updated. There is a welcome page written by Castle's Managing Director, but turn the page and immediately there is reference to Acorn Computers Ltd. Even the RISC OS contract page refers to Acorn Computers Ltd, not Castle Technology Ltd, Pace Plc or RISCOS Ltd. Screenshots and references to RISC OS are made to RISC OS 3, not RISC OS 4. There is also no mention of the extra software that Castle now bundles as standard with their computers; *Oregano*, *Resultz* and *EasiWriter*. It would be nice to see the *Welcome Guide* updated appropriately.

Of course, I am criticising what amounts to out-of-date aesthetic aspects of the *Welcome Guide*, but it would still pay to update these areas. Apart from this, what we have here is an excellent and comprehensive *Welcome Guide*, which is clearly laid out and well illustrated.

Once the computer, modem and monitor were setup and connected, the A7000+ Odyssey was ready for it's first test: startup time. And would everything work first time, as it should?

The results are impressive. This machine took precisely 20 seconds from power-on to give me a fully working desktop. Not only that, but computer, keyboard, mouse and display were all working perfectly.

Restarting the machine from the desktop took just 17 seconds. Not much of a difference from power-up, but that's because the power-up time was impressive to start with.

Castle have set this machine up with the display at 800 x 600 with 32 thousand colours at 75Hz. Whilst this is a nice setting, I did find the display on the screen wasn't as sharp as I would have expected. I changed the display to 1024 x 768 with 25 colours at 70Hz and immediately the display was much crisper and the dimensions much nicer to the eye. This is because the flat panel display is optimised to run at 1024 x 768; anything less and it has to stretch it, which of course makes it lose some of it's sharpness. I would therefore recommend that you run at 1024 x 768 unless you really do need those extra colours.

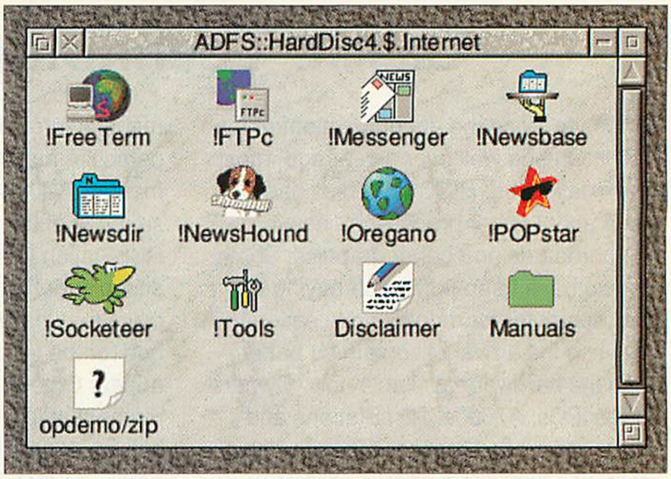


fig iv: the Internet directory

RiscStation and MicroDigital both supply RISC OS 4 as standard with their machines. Like the Kinetic RiscPC, it's the only way they will work properly (if at all). Castle, however, had a choice; they could have used RISC OS 3.7 or RISC OS 4. Thankfully, the A7000+ Odyssey Surf comes supplied with RISC OS 4. RISC OS 4 really is a must-have on any new machine, as it offers many benefits over previous versions of RISC OS, not least a suitably impressive speed increase and a much nicer look to it (new icons and other aesthetic improvements). RISC OS Select can be installed on this model, allowing you to keep right up-to-date with the latest developments and improvements with the operating system.

As this is specifically an Internet machine, it is essential for it to be supplied with suitable software, as well as the obligatory modem. Here Castle do not disappoint, with a directory on the harddrive crammed full of Internet goodies. The two most important pieces of software here are *Oregano* and *Socketeer* (Web browser and connection suite, respectively). *Socketeer* is a good piece of freeware for connecting to the Internet, but personally I'd like to see *DialUp* bundled with this machine; I'd definitely recommend contacting RComp and obtaining this excellent piece of software, as it is much easier to setup connections and also takes .INS files, which are provided by ISPs for *Windows* users to setup their computers to connect to the Internet. Users who upgrade to *RISC OS Select* will be supplied with the *RISC OS Internet Suite*, another good way of connecting.

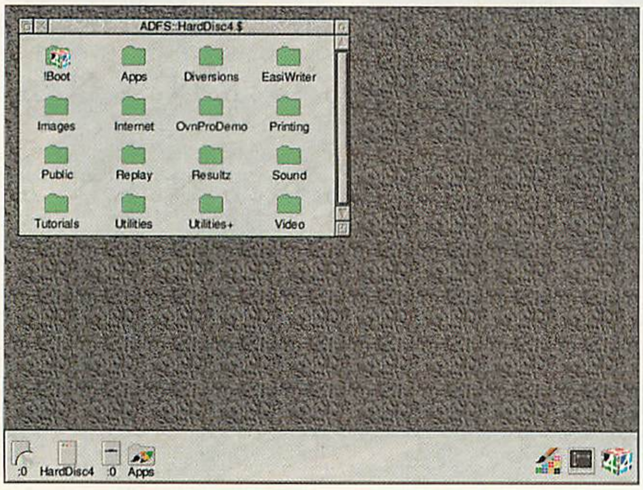


fig iii: the RISC OS 4 desktop

As mentioned, the browser supplied here is Castle's very own *Oregano*. Currently, *Oregano* is the best RISC OS browser available, it's as simple as that. It hasn't seen any updates for a while, but we do know that *Oregano2* is currently in the process of being RISC OS-ised (it's mainly used in TV set-top boxes and similar products) and should be with us soon, although exactly when is not known.

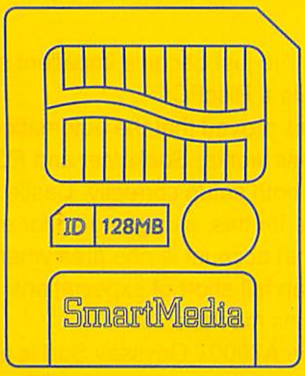
The other software included here includes *FreeTerm*, which is a terminal emulator; *FTPc*, Colin Granville's unbeatable file transfer software; *Messenger*, the email and news reader (the professional version is available from RComp); *Newshound*, to fetch and send news; *POPstar*, to fetch and send email; and *Tools*, which includes *AcornICQ* and other useful utilities. With this machine, Castle provide everything you need to get going on the Internet.

Having cast my eye over the array of Internet software included, it was finally time to connect to the Internet and see how the machine performed at its specified task.

I duly loaded *Socketeer*, which popped up an amusing icon on the left side of the iconbar. Clicking on this icon brought up a little launch window above it with a range of Internet software icons (*Messenger*, *Oregano* etc) and a Connect button. Next to the Connect button is the a small menu with two options: BT ClickFree or Signup. You can either connect using BT ClickFree, which is just a connection (no email or news group services are provided here) at local rate, or signup to Freeserve, which is also at local rates but with the option of signing up to an unmetered account (you also get email and news services).

As far as I was aware BT ClickFree had become defunct a long time ago. Still, the option to connect to it was facing me so, out of pure curiosity, I clicked

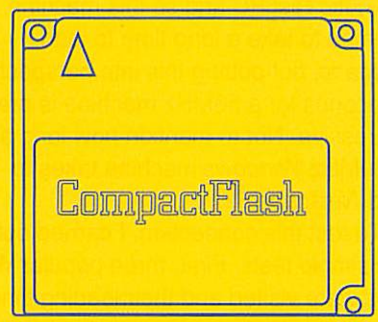
SmartMedia™ or CompactFlash™



DigiFlash, Surftec's range of CompactFlash and SmartMedia parallel port card readers for RISC OS systems.

Simply plug in, double click and away you go! DigiFlash shows an extra disc icon, allowing data to be copied to* and from the media just as if it was a floppy disc.

*SmartMedia is currently read only.



Add Photodesk's new Photoshow software for just £20! (£23.50 inc VAT).



DigiFlash

The data card reader for RISC OS

Add Warm Silence Software's excellent Win95FS software for just £25! (£29.37 inc VAT).

!Win95FS Offer!

Your choice of either a CompactFlash or SmartMedia reader for just...

£79

£92.82 inc VAT

SmartMedia	exc VAT	inc VAT
8MB	£8.40	£9.87
16MB	£10.80	£12.69
32MB	£16.20	£19.03
64MB	£27.60	£32.43
128MB	£63.60	£74.73

CompactFlash	exc VAT	inc VAT
8MB	£15.60	£18.33
16MB	£18.00	£21.15
32MB	£19.80	£23.26
64MB	£31.20	£36.66
128MB	£50.40	£59.22
256MB	£110.40	£129.72
MicroDrive 340MB	£160.85	£189.00
MicroDrive 1GB	£288.51	£339.00

How to place your order...

To order, simply send a cheque made payable to 'Surftec Ltd', (please remember to include VAT) along with your full name, address and most importantly your e-mail address as this will be used to provide you with future software updates. Postage to all UK destinations is FREE on orders over £70.

We regret we are unable to take credit or debit cards.

http://www.surftec.net/

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Connect. After a very reasonable 31 seconds dialling and logging in period, I was connected to the Internet. Obviously, BT ClickFree is still available in some form after all; I suspect it is now part of the BT Openworld portfolio of services (formerly know as BT Internet).

It was time to run some tests on Web sites; how fast would they load, and how well would *Oregano* render them? *Oregano* itself was fairly quick to load, taking just 5 seconds. I am used to using a Kinetic RiscPC and so this machine seemed to take a long time to load *Oregano*, but putting this into perspective, 5 seconds for a 56MHz machine is pretty impressive. Not to mention how long a 1000MHz *Windows* machine takes to load *Netscape 6*...

To test this connection, I carried out a few simple tests. First, three popular Web sites were visited and their loading times noted (plus how well *Oregano* rendered them). Then the RISC OS 4 *Destiny* patch, a 246K Zip file, was timed for download time from the Acorn User Web site. Here are the results:

castle.uk.co:	27 seconds
bt.com:	41 seconds
news.bbc.co.uk:	53 seconds
Destiny:	43 seconds @4.6K/sec

Oregano coped admirably with all these sites, which rendered as they do under *Windows* browsers (except with anti-aliased text, of course). This is testament to both the high quality of *Oregano* and indeed some well-written Web sites which are not tied down to *Internet Explorer 5* (as some very poor Web site designers tend to do).

BT ClickFree is fine for those who want to pop on the Internet once in a blue moon, check Web-based e-mail and maybe check one or two Web sites. Most people, however, will want a choice of access packages and proper POP3 e-mail facilities. Castle provide *Socketeer* with a Signup option, which should allow one to signup for one of the various Freeserve packages. Freeserve, unlike BT ClickFree, is a fully fledged ISP with e-mail and newsgroup facilities included. Since I last used *Socketeer* about 2 years ago, things have changed at Freeserve, with various new access packages and a new signup page. Have Castle kept on top of things? Can one still sign up with a Castle computer? There was only one way to find out... I set about signing up for a Freeserve account.

Upon clicking Connect, the usual dialling and logging on took place, but then a Web page was launched, which turned out to be the Freeserve homepage. So far so good. This page listed the different sort of accounts available (such as Pay As You Go, Unmetered etc) and along with a prompt to click on the type of account you want to sign up with. As this was just a test for the Acorn User review I decided to go for the No Ties option, which is basically Pay As You Go at local rates.

I'm sure you can guess the rest of the procedure - enter details, tick and untick boxes so as not to get junk mail and the such like. After several pages of entering details and selecting options, one is presented with two options to click on: Automatic setup or Manual setup.

I clicked on the Automatic option... and the machine froze. Nothing responded. Two or three seconds later and a message appeared, telling me to disconnect from the Internet and restart *Socketeer*. The freeze must just have been a thinking period or one of those 'Have I Crashed Or Not?' moments.

Following this prompt, I disconnected from the Internet and duly restarted *Socketeer*. The connection menu had gained an extra entry - Freeserve. I select this and clicked Connect. Cue the usual dialling and logging in and then... another moment when I thought the machine had crashed on me. Once again, two seconds later the machine sprung back into life; it had simply been starting POPstar which was now fetching email from my Freeserve account. I should point out that the machine is not being slow; I've just become impatient since I'm used to a RiscPC!



fig iv: Castle's Web site was a quick loader

This proved that the automatic signup process works; *Socketeer* and *POPstar* were both setup correctly. Castle deserve praise for this, as signing up for an Internet account is one area where RISC OS can fall short of expectations. Not so with this machine.

The A7000+ Odyssey Surf is also supplied with *EasiWriter* and *Resultz*, powerful document processor and spreadsheet respectively. *EasiWriter* is *Word* compatible, making it an excellent inclusion. I used *EasiWriter* to write this review on; the software is great and the machine copes with the task easily. I personally do not like the keyboard that Castle supply with their machines; I find you have to bang rather than type lightly to make sure each key depression is picked up by the computer. However, that's a matter of personal preference.

Overall, I was impressed with this computer. It is well specified and comes with all the software and hardware to connect to the Internet and also serve as a general-purpose machine. Although it doesn't sound it, 56Mhz is fast enough for this sort of use.

Next month we'll be reviewing RiscStations's entry.

Acorn A7000+ Odyssey Surf

56Mhz ARM 7500 FPU processor
24meg RAM
52x CD-ROM
8gig HDD
Dynamode external V90 modem
Oregano + other Internet utilities
EasiWriter
Resultz

Castle Technology Ltd
Ore Trading Estate
Woodbridge Road
Framlingham
Suffolk IP13 9LL

www.castle.uk.co
sales@castle.uk.co



fig v: bt.com takes 41 seconds to load

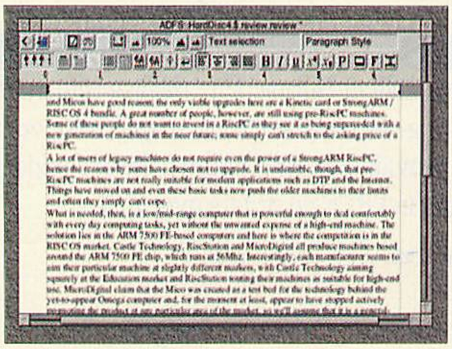


fig vi: EasiWriter in action

Michael Stubbs
editor@acornuser.com

WIN a fantastic LCD screen!

iiyama



Answer this simple question and you could win a fantastic 15" iiyama LCD display courtesy of Castle Technology.

How long did the Castle Web site take to load on the A7000+ Odyssey, reviewed in this issue of Acorn User?

Send your answer on a postcard marked "Feb 2002 Competition" to:
Acorn User · 28a Middle Hiiillgate · Stockport · Cheshire
SK1 3AY · United Kingdom

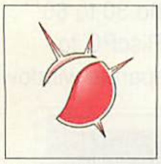
Entries must be in by Wednesday 20th February 2002.

CASTLE

Creative text with Cerilica's Insignia

Whenever I design a logo or graphic, I usually leave the lettering to last. Unless I intend to embed any lettering into the design in some way, I fall into the trap of preferring to concentrate on producing a suitable artwork. See *figure I* as an example of this.

The name of the Web site that will use the logo, our example here, needs to appear with the logo, but given the design



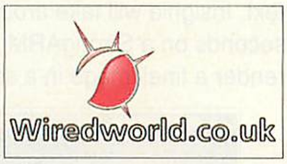


Fig I (left): artwork before any lettering and Fig II (right): first attempt at adding lettering

of the compass device, this proves a little tricky. While *figure II* shows my initial attempt at placing some lettering on the graphic, it doesn't feel quite right; the lettering betrays its designer's lack of planning by looking slightly sterile next to the compass.

At this point I would need to combine the forces of *Photodesk*, my bitmap image editor, and *Artworks*, my vector drawing package in order to mix some texture and effects into the lettering to enable the lettering and the logo to visually match and finalise the design.

Figure III illustrates some lettering produced by Insignia in a few clicks of my mouse; using a texture in the form of a



Fig III: textured lettering

photo of some red material, a shy grey shadow and some mild rippling, I was able to complete the banner.

Insignia manages to combine image processing effects seen in packages like *Photodesk* with text manipulation facilities like those available in *FontFX 6* into another graphical application of a standard we have come to expect from Cerilica.

To aid my designs, I usually look for and study other logos and similar graphic designs to get ideas and inspiration and I've found that some designs use effects which up and till now were hard to produce using RISC OS software.

After using it for myself, I'm glad that some of these effects, once difficult to achieve, are now available. I'll take a deeper look at the effects available a little later.

Before you start

First I want to stress something which might seem obvious initially but it's important you understand this: *Insignia* is dedicated to lettering. Nine times out of ten, you will need to crack open a suitable design package to fuse Insignia's output with further design work to produce a quality finalised logo or graphic device. Having said that, Insignia is perfectly capable of independently rendering things like headings, titles and banners for Web sites, magazines, leaflets, you name it. The fact that I can rely on Insignia to come to my aid when I need to enhance the visual character of a page of work seriously impresses me and there's no doubt that it saves you a lot time.

The key to Insignia's strengths is its flexible options layout. The user is free to navigate a series of options windows to select and tweak a whole range of graphic effects in order to engineer a final graphic ready to be saved as a graphic file format of the user's choice. This already gives Insignia a strong lead over the need to utilise separate art packages. A design can be tweaked and redrawn within Insignia with little fuss.

There are two mental stages you'll find yourself going through when using *Insignia*: the first is the classic 'wow look at all these features, I must use them all' syndrome. Your artwork will quite possibly look something like *figure IV*, a case of 'how many effects can I fit around one word?'

I recommend you play with Insignia before you get down to some real work with it in order to familiarise yourself with



Fig IV: lots of effects!

the software. *Figure IV* uses a photo of a celebrity positioned as required with Insignia placing a linearly graduated green tint over it. The brown text was given a shadow, warped using the vortex effect and then radially tinted an infectious pink.

Then, for added fun, a lens flare effect is created to add further kick. You know you're using a good piece of software when you actually enjoy using it.

The second stage is 'I'll use what is necessary' syndrome as figure v shows. It takes a strong willed designer to know when enough is enough and not to overkill a logo, so take it from me when I say you can quite easily do this with Cerilica's new feature creature. *Figure v* combines a pastel blue tint with an elementary texture and some slightly radially shaded text. The after effect 'spangles' was then used to create those cute white stars. Finally, by experimenting, you can discover new



Fig V: restrained use of effects

effects by combining existing ones and thus avoid the trap of producing titles and images that start to look similar.

In detail

To begin using *Insignia*, click on its iconbar icon to be presented with a control window that provides you with access to the various option windows while a box in the middle of the window illustrates the lettering in a pre-rendered state.

The little coloured dots around the lettering indicate various control points used by the effects you've activated for the lettering. For example the green dot shows where the radial background tint starts, the purple dot shows where the lens flare effect starts and the yellow dot shows where it ends. You can move the dots around the box by clicking on and dragging them to where ever you want, something I'm quite a fan of. Cerilica have pointed out that they're looking to replace the dots with something a little more obvious before they release *Insignia* to the public.

Going from left to right, the buttons along the toolbar perform the following actions when clicked on: open text options window; open text shape options window; open text colours window; open background options window; option effect options window; open shadow options window; open after effect options window; toggle whether or not *Insignia* auto-updates the display if you type in new text or change the text's size and shape; produce final rendered image.

The process of creating your image is



Fig VI: textured background

simple, type in some text, select some options, click on final render then keep adjusting options to suit and rendering until happy.

From the text options window, you can type in the text you want and select the font you want to use from a standard font pop-up menu. You can also specify the text's start height and width and end height and width as well as the size of the final image. It is a shame, though, that you can't enter more than one line of text into Insignia.

From the shape window you can choose whether to have the text as a straight line, as an arc or as a star. With each setting, you can have the text rotated and with the arc and star settings you have full control over the angles at which to plot the text. I found configuring the position of the text a little tricky in arc mode but I'm assuming it requires a little patience to get it exactly how you want it.

From the colour options window you can really start having fun. The text can have a plain colour, be radially or linearly shaded or perhaps given a texture. I love the way I can drag a spritefile on to the colour options window and see a thumbnail of it as I adjust its position and tile options.

There's normally a lot of hassle involved in doing this in other art packages as you generally have to mess about with masks to get a texture onto the text, so this feature is very much welcome.

The text's texture can be tiled or scaled to fit depending on the user's taste. The text colour and texture can also be tinted.This is very handy for textures and creating shades across texts. It's so nice to be able to easily do this from Insignia and another very welcome feature. Tints can be applied evenly over the text or graduated radially or linearly.

The strength of the tint can be specified as a percentage and start point of the radial and linear tints can be positioned from the preview window.

Next is the background options window. You can define the background as a texture using a sprite or a plain colour or a graduated fill. *Figure VI* uses a rectangular graduated tint from the edges to create a suitable atmosphere with the red brick texture.

The vortex tool was used to create the flowing text. I'm particularly fond of the way the background and the foreground can be easily manipulated without the need to mess with any painting tools seen in RISC OS *Paint* and commercial bitmap editors, everything is controlled from menus and icons. This should appeal to people who might not be greatest of artists or those who can't draw using a mouse or similar pointing device; Insignia will happily do all the hard work of drawing the image for you and all you need to worry about is getting the right balance of effects and colours.

Next is the effects options window and also where *Insignia* further excels as a design aid. From here you can apply an effect from a pop up menu of four possible effects to the image's text: Blur, Halftone, Ripple, Vortex and Pixelise. Blur will smooth and blend the text into the background. Halftone breaks the text into small circles to achieve quite an attractive effect that looks like someone's laid a ventilation grill over the text.

Ripple is another favourite of mine and basically modulates the outline of the text onto a small configurable wave to produce the effect of rippled text.

Vortex is a tool that needs a bit getting used to but is well worth it as it can really make your logos appear more dynamic on a page by bending the flow of the text around a configurable spiral vortex.

The position of the start of the vortex influences the strength of the deformation of the text and this effect is certainly the most fun out of the four. The fourth effect is Pixelise and generates the effect similar to when text is incorrectly scaled in a document and starts to lose its anti-aliased smoothness.

Next to the effects options window button sits the icon that opens the shadow options window. From here you can position, as well as configure the colour, size, strength and smoothness of the shadow. Using a shadow helps to give depth to your text and with Insignia, it couldn't be simpler. In other bitmap editors, it can be a pain to copy the text, darken it to form the shadow, create a mask to overlay the foreground and then position by hand.

The after-effects

Now if this wasn't enough, we come to the after effects window. Here you can apply rather funky graphical effects to overlay onto your graphic and each of them are highly configurable and flexible to suit you. The Spangles effect seen in *figure V* can litter your work with coloured stars, blobs or rings. The snowfall effect highlights the upper outline of the text with stars, blobs or rings similar to the Spangles effect.

Finally, we meet the fantastic lens flare effect as seen in figure 20. It basically looks like some one is shining a bright light across the text and causing a flare in the lens of a camera capturing the image. You can edit the colour of the flare, its start and end points, as well as its strength.

When you're all done with configuring, click on the Render icon. Depending on how many effects you've piled onto the text, Insignia will take around 30 to 60 seconds on a StrongARM RiscPC to render a final image in a separate window



Fig VII: textured background

as seen in *figure VII*. From this window, you can save your image as a JPEG of configurable compression, a normal RISC OS spritefile, a drawfile or as a script of commands which Insignia can reload at a later date to recreate the image.

In conclusion

To really get the best out of *Insignia*, you will need patience and obviously a big range of fonts for Insignia to feed on.

Your patience will be needed to experiment and try out all the features and to put up with the time to produce the final rendering image if you're using a machine slower than a StrongARM RiscPC. This isn't *Insignia's* fault, though. To be honest, we could do with some faster hardware.

In all, I am impressed with *Insignia* and if you're looking for a design tool to save you time and produce excellent graphic work, you will be too.

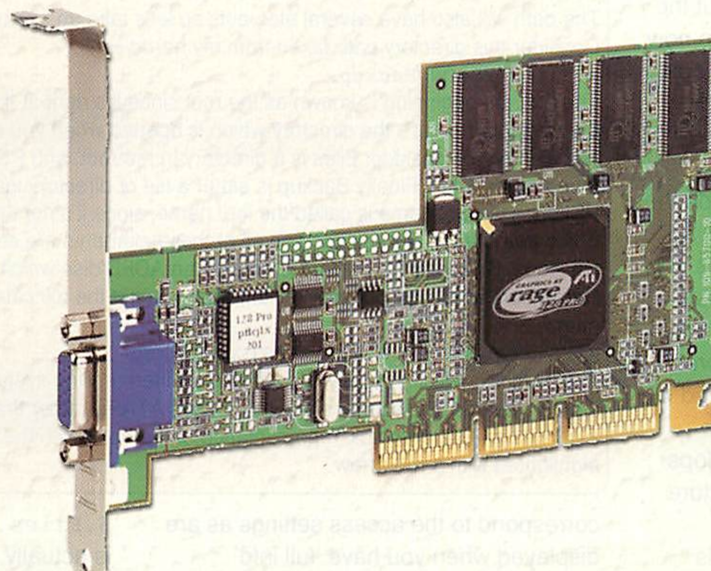
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Step into the future



With the ViewFinder graphics card from Windfall Engineering, your computing experience will be transformed. With graphics accelleration and high specification screen modes capable of driving the latest monitors to the limit, ViewFinder is the future of Acorn Risc PC graphics.

Incorporating the popular ATi XPert 2000 Pro AGP graphics card, ViewFinder gives you graphics capabilities never before seen on the Risc PC. With a massive 32 megabytes of video RAM, ViewFinder removes the limitations of the Risc PC's video system, offering higher resolutions, more colours and a flicker free display for the ultimate high-productivity environment.

See the difference ViewFinder makes :

Colours	Standard Risc PC	ViewFinder (examples)
16 million	800 x 600 @ 60 Hz	2048 x 1536 @ 67 Hz, 1920 x 1440 @ 74 Hz, 1600 x 1200 @ 91 Hz
32 thousand	1024 x 768 @ 75 Hz	2048 x 1536 @ 72 Hz, 1920 x 1440 @ 76 Hz, 1600 x 1200 @ 91 Hz
256	1280 x 1024 @ 80 Hz	2048 x 1536 @ 72 Hz, 1920 x 1440 @ 76 Hz, 1600 x 1200 @ 91 Hz

ViewFinder is available direct from Windfall Engineering, or contact your preferred RISC OS dealer.
For further information and technical specifications, please visit the Windfall Engineering web site.

Windfall Engineering

www.windfall.nl

RISC OS filing systems with the stars

In the Christmas issue, we looked at how to open a task window and get help from the command line about the other various *-commands which are now at our disposal. This week we shall look at how to negotiate filing systems and execute commands which actually do something useful.

Many operating systems try to hide the structure of your hard disc from you. A good example is *Palm OS*, where it's very difficult to access the actual filing system at all. On *Windows* you can access the filing systems using *Windows Explorer*, but the structure of a hard disc is fixed in many ways and there seems to be a trend as the operating system develops to try to hide the directory tree structure more and more.

Thankfully - as far as this series is concerned - access to the filing systems on RISC OS is routine and someone who uses the desktop should already be comfortable with the way their hard disc is laid out. The only real difference is that you can only access one directory at a time (known as the currently selected directory or CSD) and that you have to do a lot more typing! So, bearing in mind that everything happens in the CSD, the first command you'll need will tell you what's actually in the directory which you have access to. The command you need for this is `*cat`, or just `*.` for short. This will tell you which directory you're looking at, what the CSD is, and what the contents of the directory are. If you give it a go you should see something along the lines of what's shown in *figure I*. Unfortunately the alignment has a tendency to get messed up in a task window, but you should still be able to make out what's going on by comparing with the appropriate filer window. You'll notice that the letters to the right of each entry correspond to the access settings as are displayed when you have 'full info' chosen in the filer window. An important distinction is that the D in the task window stands for 'Directory', and so you can move in to these with an appropriate command. The command you need is `Dir <directory>`, where `<directory>` can be either the name of the directory which you want to move in to, or the full pathname of the directory if you want to move directly to a particular position. Taking the example in *figure I*, if I wanted to move into the Fonts directory, I could either enter

`Dir Fonts`

or alternatively I could also enter

`Dir ATAFS::HardDisc4.$.Fonts`

both of which will get me to the correct place. To check to see where you have gone, you may want to type cat again. Having moved down into the Fonts directory, I can move back out of it again by entering the command Up. You can see what might happen by looking at *figure II*, or by trying it out for yourself.

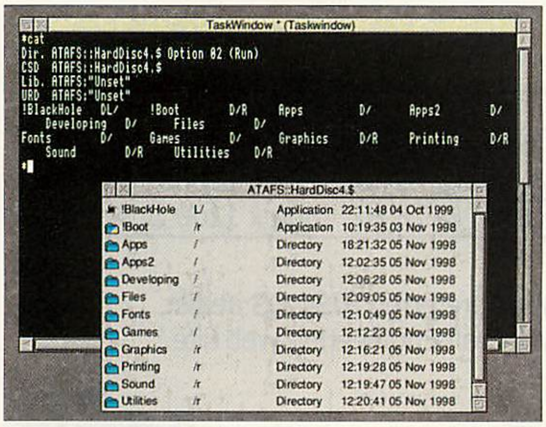


Fig I: a typical directory listing

It's a good idea to understand the format of directory and file names. You can see these in the desktop as well, at the top if every filer window you open, but there's much less reason to ever make use of them in this environment, so there's further info in the box at the top of the page.

I've mentioned already that `Up` will move you up one level of the directory structure, but another way to achieve this is to place a ^ in the directory name. For example, the directory

`$.Files.PSION.^.Other`

is actually the same place as

`$.Files.Other`

which may seem a bit pointless, but turns out to be very useful. It means that you can go up two levels from your current position by typing

`Dir ^.^`

and we'll find it to be very useful when we start putting paths into system variables; something we'll cover in a later issue.

Hopefully you're now comfortable with negotiating the directory structure of your hard disc. If you have more than one disc, or more than one filing system you can also change between these. You change filing system just be typing in the filing system name, some examples of which would be:

`ADFS` for your harddisc and floppies;
`RAM` if you have a RAM disc set up;
`CDFS` for your CD drives;
`ResourceFS` for your resources directory.

You can change between drives on a filing system with the Drive command. On ADFS, Drive 0 will give you the floppy drive whilst Drive 4 will usually be your hard disc. You may need to type *Mount

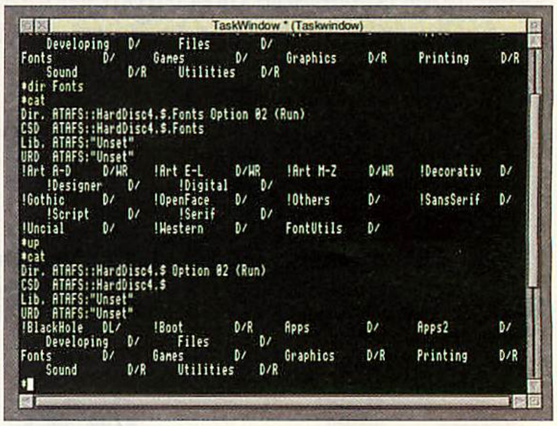


Fig II: moving out of a directory

There are three distinct elements to a full catalogue name. These are the filing system, disc name and directory/file path and they are separated in the following way:

`<filing system>::<disc name>.<path>`

The path will also have several elements so let's take an example. Consider this directory path taken from my harddisc:

`$.Files.PSION.Backup`

The $ at the beginning is known as the root since it's right at the base of the directory tree. It's the directory which is opened when you click on the filer icon on the desktop. Files is a directory in the root, and PSION can be found inside Files. Finally Backup is either a file or directory inside PSION. This last name is called the leaf name, since it's right at the end of the tree branch. As you can see all of these elements are separated by full stops. Since my file Backup is held on an ADFS disc which I've called HardDisc4, when you put them all together you get the full catalogue name:

`ADFS::HardDisc4.$.Files.PSION.Backup`

The harddisc which I usually use runs on a different filing system, so you may notice from the screen shots that it says ATAFS rather than ADFS. *Figure III* gives a graphical representation of the path, with the file highlighted with a red arrow.

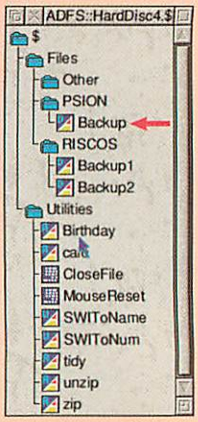


Fig III (see left)

if you've changed disc so that the computer knows it needs to read in the directory information again. If you're not sure which drive a disc is in, but do know it's name, then you can type `*Mount <disc name>` to go straight to that disc. Now let's look at some of the commands which you can apply to files and directories. To use them you'll need to type in the names of files or directories and you can do this either by specifying the full name or, if the object is already in the CSD, you can just type it's leaf name.

A command which I find quite handy is Create. This will create an empty file, or a file of a given length. If you type `Help Create` you'll see that the format looks quite complicated but don't worry, you can ignore the exec addr and load addr parts and the rest is quite straightforward.

To create a new, empty file, you just type `Create <filename>` where `<filename>` is the name you want to call the file. Be careful not to use the name of an object which already exists as creating a file with the same name could delete the original object. If you want to make it a certain size, append the size to the end. Note however that you need to use hexadecimal (base 16) where A-F stand for 10-15 respectively, so for a file called Temp with size 90 bytes, you'd need to type

`Create Temp 5A`

If you look at the file which you've created in a filer window, you'll see it has type Data (&ffd). To give it a different type, a text file say, you could use

`SetType Temp Text`

(or `SetType Temp FFF` since text files have the numerical type &FFF). If you now load the file into a text editor, you'll find that it's full of junk: probably the contents of the last file which you deleted. Let's also create a new directory and move our file into it. To create a directory called MyDir, we can type `CDir MyDir`. To move the file Temp into it we need to use the Copy command. Typing `Help Copy` will show that this command has lots of options. We actually want to move our file rather than copying it, so we have to use the Delete option. This sounds a bit heavy, but all it does is delete the original after it's been copied to the new location, effectively acting as if it had been moved. So to move the file we type

`Copy Temp MyDir.Temp D`

The computer will ask you to confirm that you want this done, so type `y` to do so and then to check that it has moved, change to the MyDir directory and catalogue it, as in *Figure IV*.

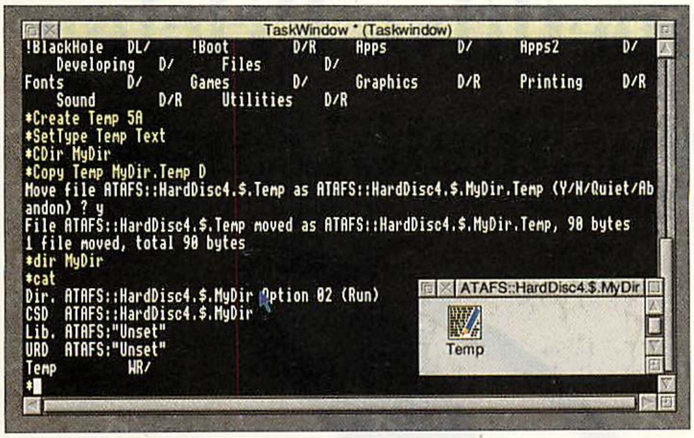


Fig IV: changing to the MyDir directory and cataloging

Finally, you can delete the file which you created, and the MyDir directory by using the `Delete` command. See *figure V* for how you might do this, but be careful not to delete anything important since if you ask it to, it will! Another handy command is `*Info`. No, I'm not referring to the old programming column of the same name, but to a way of discovering more about your files. Typing `Info <object>` will tell you all of the file details on `<object>`, for example it will tell you its filetype, the access details and when it was created. Other file commands which you may well find to be useful are given in the More File Commands box to the right. There's also a summary of all of the commands we've learnt so far.

In fact, we've only just scratched the surface as far as commands are concerned, but this series regrettably is too small to give a description of all of the possibilities and they're certainly not just restricted to files. For example, you can turn sound on and off using the `Audio On` and `Audio Off` commands, or you could save a screen shot using the `ScreenSave <file>` command. The best way to discover the multitude of different commands is to pick out some interesting looking ones from the *StrongHelp* manual mentioned last week and read through their entries.

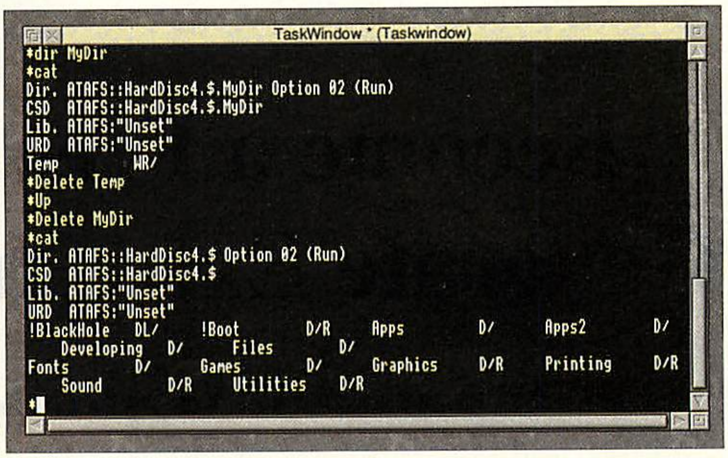


Fig V: deleting files and directories

Next month, I'll introduce a program which will let you turn a *-command into a fully functioning multi-tasking wimp application. Then after that, we will take a look at Obey files.

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*Rename <from> <to>
Renames an object
*Count <name>
Tells you the size of a given file.
*Type <file>
Displays the contents of a file on the screen as text.
*Dump <name>
Displays the contents of a file in hexadecimal and as text.
*Stamp <name>
Sets the date stamp of the named file to the current time.
*Filer_Run <name>
Runs a file or application; it has the same effect as double clicking on the object.
*Filer_OpenDir <name>
Opens the named directory in the desktop.

`*Help <subject>`
Gives help on the command <subject>.
`*Cat`
Displays the catalogue for the currently selected directory.
`*Dir <directory>`
Moves into the directory <directory>.
`*Up`
Moves up one level of the directory hierarchy.
`*Drive <number>`
Change the physical drive being used.
`*Mount [<disc name>]`
Set up a disc ready for use.
`*Create <name> [<size>]`
Create a file with given name and size.
`*SetType <name> <type>`
Sets the filetype of a file.
`*CDir <name>`
Creates a new directory with the given name.
`*Copy <from> <to> [<opts>]`
Makes a new copy of the given file.
`*Delete <name>`
Deletes the named file.
`*Info <name>`
Gives information about the named object.

Getting it right on the World Wide Web

This article, as the name suggests, is hopefully going to give you some pointers on what to do and what not to do when designing a Web site. This is not an HTML tutorial so I am going to try and stay as far away from the coding side of a Web page as possible.

Before starting to write any HTML the following areas should be taken into consideration:

- Minimum resolution
- Purpose of the site
- Menu style and structure
- Number of pages
- Text and link styles
- Background colour or texture
- Site graphics
- HTML validation

Minimum resolution

A Web page will ideally work at any resolution, but this certainly is not always the case. Today, very few people use computers and monitors that run at a resolution of less than 800x600 but there are some, so you have to consider what is the minimum resolution you want to design for.

A minimum resolution only comes in to play when fairly large graphics are used and span more than the width of the screen. This creates the need for horizontal scrolling which many people find irritating. Also, try and keep your page length down to a reasonable length so people with a low resolution don't have to scroll for a long time to reach the bottom of the page.

You should take it in to consideration who you think the main viewers of your site will be. If you would like to accommodate for everyone, don't use any graphics that total more than around 610 pixels in width. This will allow those people running at a resolution of 640x480 to view your page without any horizontal scrolling.

Purpose of the site

The purpose of the site can decide how design-orientated your page needs to be. All sites incorporate some sort of design, but some sites are a little more elaborate than others.

Some pages are made up purely of text with a small menu at the top of the page. Such pages are often found within University department sites. These pages are created for one purpose alone, that is to pass on information to educate people. There is no need for any fancy design, just straightforward paragraphs of text on a plain background. This allows the text to be read with ease without the users attention being taken elsewhere.

Not many sites are as plain as that though and most incorporate more of a design feature, whether it be the menu taking over the design or a title graphic for the site.

Before you start the design of the site, think about what it really needs to do. If it is required to pass on detailed information make it as simple as possible, but if the content of the page isn't quite as detailed add a little more design to the page to make it more interesting for the user.

Menu style and structure

The menu is a very important part of any Web site that consists of more than one page. It should be simple, obvious how to use and should be visible straight away (and preferably at all times).

A menu structure has to be thought about carefully if there are a lot of pages to be linked to. There is an unwritten rule that every page within a single Web site should be accessible within three clicks of the mouse button (or any other input device used!) from the main page. This simple rule, when applied, stops the site structure getting too complex and allows the user to get back to the front page quickly to start again if required.

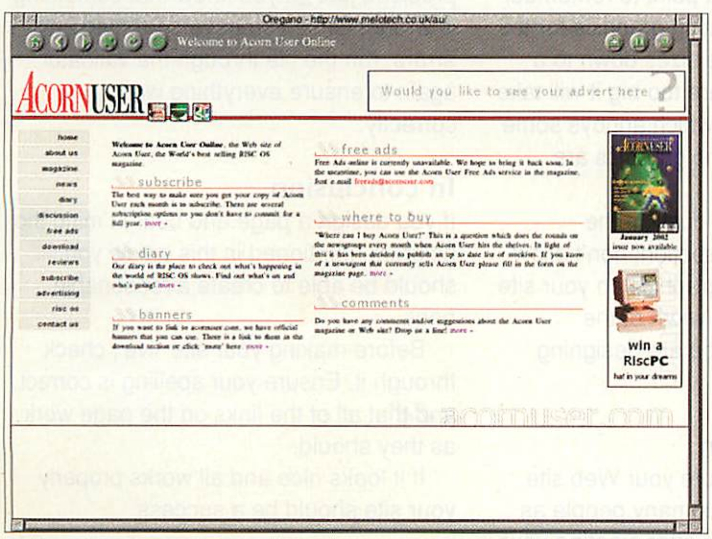


fig I: the development version of the new Acorn User Web site uses a vertical menu system for site navigation.

Always make the menu visible on the first main screen the user sees. Place it as close to the top of the page as possible, again for those using lower resolutions the menu may not be visible if it is too far down the page.

Two common menu systems are used in pages throughout the Internet; the vertical menu and the horizontal menu, each with their pros and cons.

The vertical system, on most pages that have adopted this style of menu, runs down the left hand side of the screen and allows people to clearly see how many different sections there are in the site (see the screenshot in *fig I*, at the bottom-left of this page, for an example). The vertical style is most advantageous when there are a lot of sections in the site as it can run the length of the page. It also allows easy expansion of a site; adding an extra section link to the bottom of the menu does not affect the overall design of the page.

The horizontal menu system normally runs the width of the screen at the top of the page (see the screenshot in *fig II* on the next page for an example). This style of menu allows only a few sections to be linked to, remember that there is a minimum resolution on which the site should work so don't make it too wide or else a horizontal scroll bar may appear! The advantage of this menu is that it only takes up a relatively small amount of the page and can therefore fit discreetly at the top of a page. It doesn't allow great expansion, however, which is the weakness of this method.

Number of pages

The number of pages within a site must be considered before starting the design. As mentioned above in the 'menu style and structure' section, the type of menu you decide to use can be affected by the number of pages the site contains and therefore the number of menu links required.

There is no limit on the number of pages a site can or should contain. Sites can consist of a single page or can contain hundreds or thousands of pages. The BBC site (**www.bbc.co.uk**), for example, is made of what must now be thousands of pages, yet it is so well structured that it doesn't seem that large.

Do remember that if you ever want to update a menu system or redesign a part of the page design, that the greater number of pages there are, the more pages you will have to update (unless you have adopted a design that uses PHP or other file linking technology); just something to bare in mind if you want all of the pages of your site to maintain the same design structure.

Text and link styles

The size, colour and font used in a Web page can emphasize a design but it can also create the opposite effect.

The problem evolves even further when it is realised that there is a very restricted number of fonts available for use in Web pages and even less available on *Oregano*. As you may have noticed when using the *Oregano* browser under RISC OS, the text always looks the same, unless it is as part of a graphic. This is due to the limitations in the *Oregano* font manager in this release. There really isn't any way around this problem; you will simply have to think about your audience. If you think many of your visitors will be using a different platform to browse your site you can always take in to consideration assigning a font style even though it wouldn't be beneficial to those using *Oregano*. Also remember that if you are writing for the *MacOS* platform don't use a font size lower than 10 point, as any smaller is too small for the user to read. RISC OS and *Windows* display the fonts at similar sizes so it is a case of common sense as to what size you use.

The text colour should be clear and easy to read against the background that you have chosen to use (see next section 'background colours and textures'). Again, it is down to common sense as to whether you can read it or not. You have to be careful when using a dark background. Using a contrasting colour, for example white text on a black background, doesn't always work as well as you may have thought, as the clarity of the text can be reduced. One way around the problem is to use a darker colour, such as a light grey.

The link colours should be different to that of the main body of text so that it is easy to see where and what are links. If you can't see it you won't use it. This is a fairly basic idea but some people don't think carefully enough when creating the colour scheme.

For greater ease in managing the font styles and colours used in your Web page it is possible to use CSS (Cascading Style Sheets). These have limited support in the current versions of *Oregano* and *WebsterXL* but the basics can be used. It allows all text and links to be defined from one central file that is linked to using a line of code on every HTML page. Do think about using such technology as it will save you time in the future if you have a large number of pages and want to change the colour or style of the text on your pages.

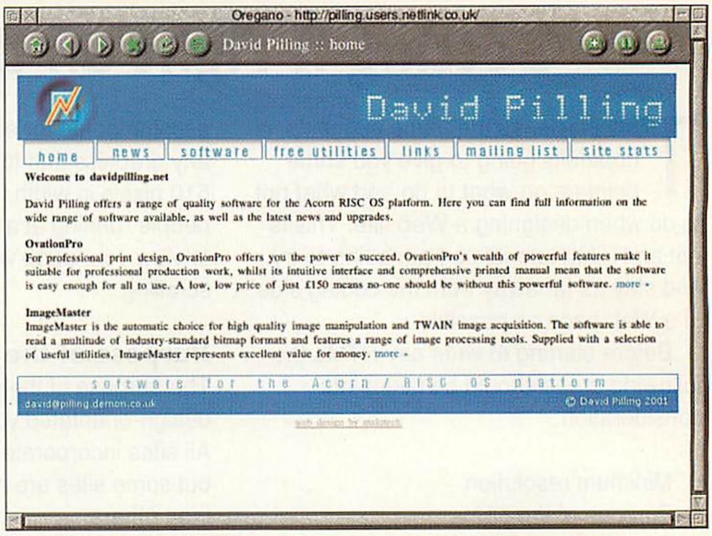


fig II: David Pilling's Web site uses a horizontal menu system

Background colour or texture

There is nothing wrong with using a background colour or texture, just ensure that it ties in with any other graphics or colours used in the page. Also make sure it is fairly subtle and isn't so busy that it obscures and draws the eye away from the text.

There are no colours that can't be used but from a design aspect you should stay clear of strong colours and any colours similar to the text and links.

Site graphics

A Web site doesn't necessarily require any graphics; however, most sites now use some sort of graphics to add a small amount of design flare. The graphics can range from a logo or menu to the whole site being a graphic, although many people don't consider a totally graphic site to be 'real' Web design, more like graphic design on the Internet.

The most important point to remember at all times when creating graphics for the Web is to keep the file sizes down to a minimum. If the files are too big it will take too long to download which annoys some people, especially if the graphics are essential to the site.

As mentioned previously in the 'minimum resolution' section, don't allow the total width of the graphics on your site to be greater than the width of the minimum resolution you are designing for.

HTML Validation

If you want to make sure your Web site will be accessible to as many people as possible it is advisable after creating your HTML that you validate it.

There are many sites on the Internet that have a validation service available for the general public to use. Probably the most popular one is hosted by the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) at **vaildator.w3.org**.

There are two ways that you can check your HTML files. The first is to upload all of your files you want validating to some Web space then going to the above URL and type in the address of each individual file. Alternatively you can upload directly from your hard drive to the W3C server for checking. Only one file at a time can be checked so if you have a large site you may have to be patient.

After running the check a page will be displayed telling you either that your page is valid or it will list the problems with your page. If there is a problem with your page each error will be listed with a description of what is or could be wrong with that particular section of code. Don't be too alarmed at some of the error messages that might appear. As with many debugging tools, error messages don't give you any help at all in correcting the problem, just let you know that something is wrong. Once you have corrected any errors, run the file through the vaildator again to ensure everything works correctly.

In conclusion

If you design a page and bear in mind the pointers mentioned in this article you should be able to create a reasonable page.

Before making your site 'live', check through it. Ensure your spelling is correct and that all of the links on the page work as they should.

If it looks nice and all works properly your site should be a success.

Philip Gilbert
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Part 2: Tracking media

In the first of this series we had a look at what *S-Base* has to offer in terms of resources and the type of program we are going to create. This time we will get rather more technical on the subject of databases; first we will look at the kind of requirements and problems we run into in a general way with databases and then how this is dealt with in *S-Base* itself. This will take us one step closer to the actual program we are looking to create.

Databases

There are basically two types of database: flat-file and relational. In a flat-file database you have one type of record and there is no linkage between records beyond the fact that one occurs before or after another one.

An example of a flat-file database is an address book. Each record consists of the name of the person, and some personal details usually the address and the contact phone numbers.

They are usually in order based on the alphabetic order of individual family names; in this cosmopolitan society "surname" has less meaning, "family name" is more accurate while "Christian name" could be inappropriate so I personally go for "Given name" as an option. One size doesn't fit all but this way fits a few more than the original.

Anyway back to flat-files: Let us suppose that we have our collection of names and addresses and we have separate entries for Mr Bun the Baker, Mrs Bun, Miss Bun and Master Bun. They all live in the same house, naturally, but we have given them their own records because this database happens to track birthdays as well and they all have different birthdays.

Then the Bun family moves and we have to change all four entries to the new address, maybe a new phone number as well.

It would be far more useful if we could figure out a way to store the address as a single record on its own and then link each Bun record to the address record. Then if they move we only have to change the address once.

This is where things start becoming relational, what we need is a file of records containing a person's details along with another file of a different type of record containing the address details. Then we have to "relate" one with the other.

We can do this, there are certain requirements in terms of user interface to make this work smoothly and sensibly for the user of the address book but there's no real difficulty involved there.

But how do we make those relations work?

Relationships

Before we do anything else we better define a couple of terms which I will be using from here on: First is datafile, by this I will mean a file of similar data, for example a Person datafile or an Address datafile. then there is database, referring to {italic on}all{italic} of the datafiles and any other related files, for one application.

Looking at it from first principles, in the Person record there has to be some sort of reference that indicates which Address record relates in this occasion. And that reference needs to be unique, clearly there can be no duplication otherwise we won't know which Address record belongs to the Person.

So we have to determine what, about an Address record is unique: Postcode? Not necessarily and maybe we don't know the postcode. Road name? Town name? Obviously none of these, Postcode looked like the best option but we can't rely on it.

Let's try thinking less about content, how about the physical position of the record in the file? Records are stored in files one after the other. The Address record might be 128 bytes long in total, so the "zeroeth" record (most computer counting starts with zero) will start at file position byte zero and extend up to byte 127. The second will start at byte 128 and extend to byte 255 and so on.

This seems good. Clearly all records will have a unique position in the file so we can refer to them by their physical position. Alternatively we could just refer to them as record 0, record 1, record 2 and so on, and that would do just as well. They are all unique, you can't have two record 2s.

So in the Person record we would have a hidden field (something that isn't displayed to the user) which is called, maybe, *address_rec* and this would contain the number of the record in which the address is stored.

This is very simple and very understandable and, on the face of it, will work fine. But it won't, or rather, it will for a little while and then something will happen and it will all go horribly wrong.

What if Joe has an address book and decides that he is going to delete Pete for some terrible crime. He deletes Pete and also Pete's address.

There is now a hole in both the Person and Address files of the database. This can happen a lot and, over time, there is more and more wasted space in the files. If nothing is done about it then there is no harm but most databases have a "compact" or "tidy" option. This moves up all the records into the gaps and so leaves a nice tight, compact file.

And now some or all of the Address records will have different physical positions. Their numbers have changed. So when a Person is displayed and you take a look at his address there is a very good chance that it will now be the wrong one. Because the Address record number in the Person record has not been changed.

Now you might think *Why not?* It is simply this: the compaction routine is a database system routine, while the stored number is something that you (as the programmer) have created. The database system doesn't "know" that you have put a number in that record that is supposed to refer to a real record, nor would it know which datafile it is supposed to refer to. So we have been on the right track but this is not the solution, it also demonstrates that you don't mix system level operations and information, with operations and information at a different, higher level.

The real solution

We have correctly established that every record that needs to be related to another record type must have some method of being uniquely identified but we can't use the system to provide it automatically, we will have to do it ourselves.

Aside: *S-Base* will ultimately have its own unique identifier and relationship system which will supersede what I am saying here. However the principles of how it works will be the same and how to use it will also apply, it will just be easier.

In the Address record we have to create our own field and call it "id". We will make it an integer which gives us plenty of scope for records, we will be able to have up to about four million records, more than enough for most personal uses.

Every time we create a new Address record we will enter a number which is unique (automatically and without the user even being aware of it). And the number is then put into the *address_rec* of the Person record. This id number will

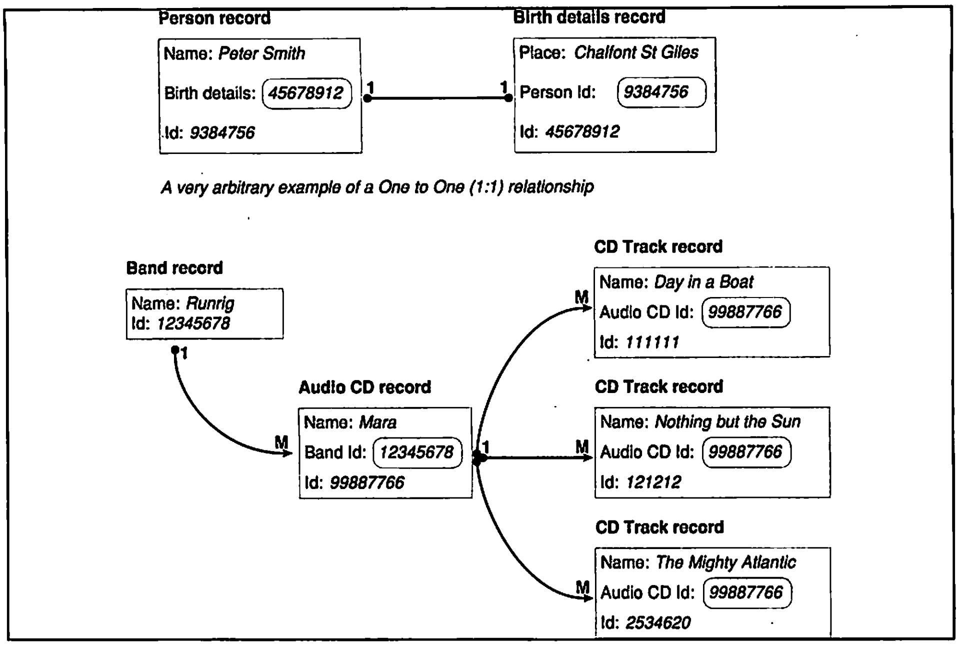


Fig I: How One to Many (1:M) relationships work together with record IDs

stay with the record regardless of whether it is moved and so fulfils our needs for a unique, unchanging identifier for the record.

But now we have another problem, if we display a Person record how do we find the correct Address? We have an identifier that uniquely identifies the Address record but we need to get it and display the address.

For that we need to have indexes.

Indexing the files

An index for a datafile is exactly the same in concept as an index for a book. Given some subject that you want to find in a book you look in the index and that tells you the physical location (page or section number) of the subject within the pages of the book.

I was very relaxed when I went over the concept of the flat-file address book and how the records are all stored in alphabetical order of family name. You should have asked: *Oh yes? And how does that happen then?*

Think about it. Do you add names to a pen-and-paper address book in alphabetical order, one after the other? Of course not. There are individual alphabet sections and they have a number of pages each. You write in the names in the order you find them out, they are not in alphabetical order within the section and sometimes you run out of space in a section.

If you use a card index it is better, you write a new name and address on a card and then "insert" it in the correct alphabetical position, all the ones after are shuffled back one position.
In the very simplest flat-files this shuffling is exactly what happens, the program scans through the actual records; finds where the record is supposed to go; shuffles the rest of the data back one record length; and then inserts the new data in exactly the right position. It can get very messy if a person changes their family name.

Instead we use an index, this is a separate file that is related to a specific datafile. The index contains a duplicate of one (or more) of a record's fields (for example the family name) plus the actual physical location of the record it relates to in the datafile.

Indexes are much smaller files than the actual datafile so they can be updated much more quickly. So we might have a set of Person records for Mr Bun, Miss Lamp, Mrs Buzz and Master Spoon. Entered in that order their records will be numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 but that's not alphabetical, the index (by name) on the other hand will look like this:

Bun	1
Buzz	4
Lamp	2
Spoon	3

So we can look up, in the index, for a name and have the record number returned to us and then load up the correct record and display the address. It's clear to see that if we then add Mr Amber at record 5 the index becomes:

Amber	5
Bun	1
Buzz	4
Lamp	2
Spoon	3

Returning to the question of unique ids, we create another index which contains the unique id related to the physical record number but we then ask ourselves, how do we choose the unique id?

There are two ways: First we keep track (somewhere) of how many records we have ever created and keep putting the next number into the if field and incrementing that number when we've done it. This would work but "keeping track somewhere" is problematic and there is a chance of there being a glitch somewhere and we end up giving two records the same id.

Instead we use random numbers and always check to see if it has been used, we can have a piece of code that does this:

```
Repeat
    Choose a random number
    Check whether it has been used
    before
    Until it hasn't been used before
    Give the new record this unique id
    number
    To check whether it has been used
    before one simply looks it up in the
    index, if it is there, don't use it.
```

Word to the wise: Give every record type an "id" field and always give every record a unique id, this can become very useful when it comes to backing up and restoring data.

Real relationships

Now we have a way of linking different record types together we must look at the three (or is it four) types of relationship that can exist.

In the address book example used above we said that more than one Person record could be linked to a single Address record and this is achieved by storing the unique id of the Address record in a field *(address_id)* in the Person record.

That is: Many Persons can be linked to One Address.

This is the Many to One relationship (it is also the One to Many relationship, it depends on the direction you are looking from).

To find which address is connected to a person we simply take the id and look it up in the Address id index.

But can we do it from the other direction? What if we are browsing through the addresses and want to know who lives there (there may be more than one) how can we do that?

We need another index. This time we have a Person index of *address_id* and in

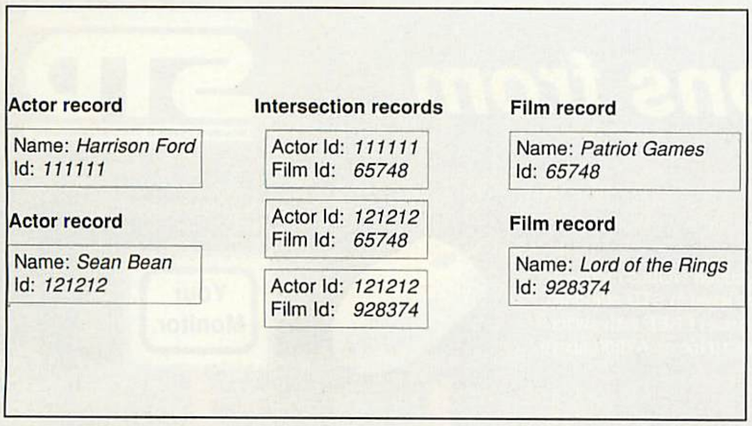


Fig II: Many to Many relationships allow much more complex relationships

this case we search it for a given address id and we may find more than one instance of it. Obviously we would need a way to display it but that is just a user interface issue.

Back to relationships: The next one to look at is the One to One relationship. This is a bit unusual because it says that a record of type A can be linked to only one record of type B, and once the B record is linked only links back to the A record.

In our address book this is the same as saying that you would have to type in the address for each of the Buns all four times because each name could only link to one address and vice versa. This type of relationship does have some use but that is not often.

The final type is the Many to Many relationship: Our address book doesn't contain an example of this so we will have to look at a different database, one that is closer to our ultimate goal.

Let us suppose that we have a database of films and actors. An actor may appear in more than one film, that is a One to Many relationship and would imply that the Film record should contain an *actor_id* field.

However a film usually contains more than one actor which is another One to Many relationship but in the other direction. This implies that the Actor record should contain a *film_id* field.

That doesn't work either. We have a Many to Many relationship between actors and films and what we need is something completely different.

We need what is technically called an *intersection record* this is, in fact, a completely separate datafile with its own set of indexes. Let's look at an example:

Films
- Patriot Games (1)
- Frantic (2)
- Lord of the Rings (3)
- X-Men (4)

Actors
- Sean Bean (1)
- Harrison Ford (2)
- Ian McKellen (3)

The number in the brackets is the record's unique identification number, its id. When creating the relationships we would create the following intersection records (Actor, Film):

A: 1,1
B: 1,3
C: 2,1
D: 2,2
E: 3,3
F: 3,4

The order given here is if we are indexed by actor, the order if indexed by film would be: A-C-D-B-E-F

Now we can look up a film and find out who acted in it, or we can look up the actor and discover which films he appeared in.

Using S-Base

Now we have looked at the types of objects and operations that are needed to create a fully functioning relational database we need to see what we have to do in *S-Base* to achieve it.

Fortunately *S-Base* is a very competent system and what is needed is very easy to implement, although a Many to Many relation takes a bit of work. It is worth pointing out that *S-Base* doesn't start counting records in a datafile from zero, it actually starts at 1, it leaves record zero as nothing. This is very handy (and deliberate) because let us say that you use the function to search an index for an id like this:

```
x = @find(media,"by id",id)
```

If x is zero it means nothing was found, this can be used in "if..then" statements because in *S-Base* zero counts as FALSE while any other number counts as TRUE. Like this:

```
if (x)
    load media,x
  else
    print "Media not found"
  endif
```

The next point is that having an integer field to contain an id is very simple and that creating an index for it is an action requiring just moments.

Figure III shows the screen with a single datafile record entry and the index created for it.

Next issue we will look at the actual creation of real datafiles, the ones we will need for this application and a look at the type of user interface we will be creating.

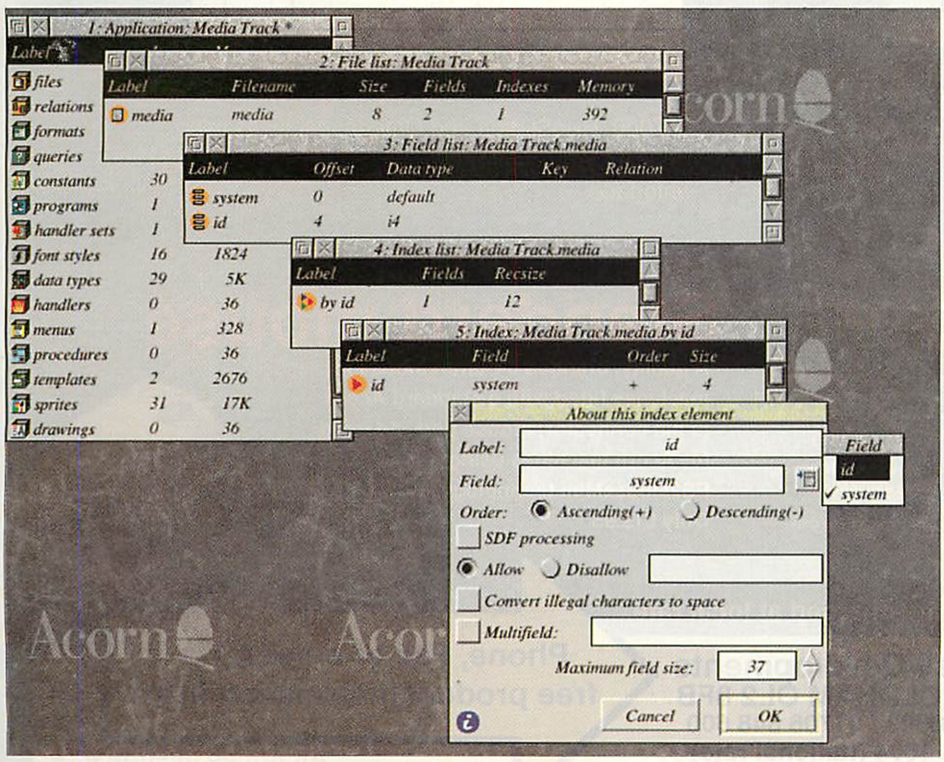


Fig III: A single datafile record entry and the index created for it

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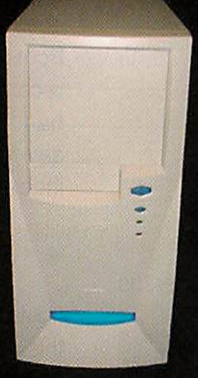
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ParaFS



PARAFS is a parallel port networking system for machines fitted with a bi-directional parallel port (A30x0 / A4000 / A5000 / A4 / A7000 / RiscStation / Mico / Omega / RiscPC)

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To PC or to RiscPC – there is no question

When Acorn's RiscPC was first conceived, it was recognised that some users would need to use so called "Industry Standard" software. Previously, Aleph1 had produced a successful series of "PC Podules" - expansion cards which were designed to fit into Acorn machines and allow them to emulate a PC.

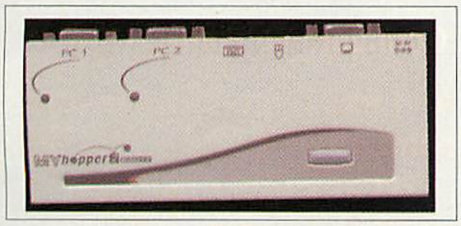
Building on this concept, and taking advantage of the fact that some of the RiscPC hardware was similar to that of its PC counterparts, Acorn designed the RiscPC with a second processor slot, which was capable of accepting a card fitted with a 486-style processor.

Although Acorn's PC card was an admirable solution in its day, even the fastest cards cannot compete with modern PC's. PC software has developed to take advantage of the fast processors, hard drives, and copious amounts of memory which adorn a current PC. Of course to RISC OS users balk at this tendency towards "bloated" software, but it is a generally accepted fact of life in the PC world.

If you need to run PC software, and the PC card isn't fast enough for the applications you need to use, surely the logical solution is to go down to your local PC superstore and buy a machine. Perhaps - but let's think this through.... You might arrive back at home and unpack your nice shiny new machine with gleaming 17" monitor. Of course machines, monitors and peripherals take up space, which might be restricted. There's a strong imperative to set up the new machine in place of the old, a pull to get value out of a new machine.

It is this issue which makes the concept of the purchase of a PC difficult for RISC OS users - if there's only room for one machine, then buying a modern PC would mean the removal of the RISC OS machine, and that is just not acceptable!

A solution comes in the form of a switch box which will allow a single monitor, keyboard and mouse to be shared between two machines. An example is the *Keyboard Controlled Switch* from Stuart Tyrrell Developments.



Keyboard controlled Switch including PS2MouseMini for RiscPC: £113.90 inc VAT
A7000/RS/Mico version: £99.95 inc VAT

The *Keyboard Controlled Switch* comes as a complete pack containing everything you need to switch monitor, keyboard and mouse between a RiscPC and a modern PC. The main unit, especially adapted for use with Acorn machines, measures just 20 x 70 x 155 mm, and is approximately the size of two large matchboxes.

The kit comes with two sets of cables – one to go out to each machine – the far end of which terminates in the three connectors which go into the monitor, keyboard and mouse. Obviously, thought has gone into the design aspects of the pack - the cables, at 1.2m and 1.8m are of conveniently different lengths.

Full instructions are enclosed in the pack, but installation is simple - just plug your existing monitor and keyboard, and the supplied mouse into the switch box, attach the two cables to the switch, and attach the other end of the cables to the monitor, keyboard and mouse sockets on the machines.

Magic

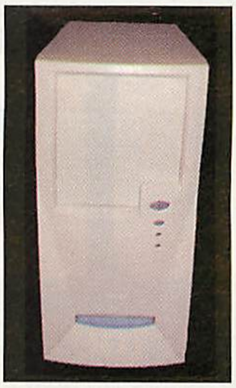
Of course there's a little bit of magic included with the RiscPC version of the switch pack. Although later machines such as the A7000 have PC-style mouse sockets, the RiscPC has the older Acorn mouse interface. This means that switch boxes cannot usually be used on the mouse port of the RiscPC.

Thankfully, STD include one of their *PS2MouseMini* interfaces in the pack. This little device looks like a simple short cable, but don't be fooled. Inside one of the connectors there is a small processor which takes information from a PC-style mouse, and presents it to the RiscPC as if it's an Acorn mouse. So, with the addition of this easy-to-use interface the RiscPC can be given a PC-style mouse socket.

Of course the mouse interface can be purchased alone to allow the use of a PC-style mouse on the RiscPC - indeed there are over a thousand users doing so - but in this case the interface allows a switch box to be attached to the mouse port of the machine.

Choice of PC

The keyboard controlled switch can be used with any modern PC fitted with PS/2-style mouse ports (which are a round connector), and switches are



High specification PCs from £499 inc VAT

available which may be used with older AT-type PCs which use a serial mouse. Needless to say a quick phone call to Stuart Tyrrell Developments will help you to ascertain your exact needs.

Quality first

Frustrated by the fact that customers were buying switches and then going on to buy PCs in the High Street which were designed with a limited lifespan, Stuart Tyrrell Developments can also supply PC base units which are based upon machines which they specified for use in their own offices.

Although sometimes a 'bargain' can be had from the High Street, often a few extra pounds spent on a sensibly specified machine will save many pounds in the long run when a machine is upgraded.

Stuart Tyrrell Developments have a number of "standard" specifications of PC base units, but these can easily be modified as required, or a full machine specified from scratch. They even supply the Keyboard Controlled Switch at a discount!

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For RISC OS users who want to experience the best of both platforms, Stuart Tyrrell Developments have the complete solution. Get in touch today or visit the Stuart Tyrrel Developments Web site for further information.

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Sounding off with VideoLogic

VideoLogic have been producing audio hardware for some time now and have gained many awards from doing so. Their speaker systems range from the highly acclaimed two-speaker *Sirocco* set-up to the *DigiTheatre 5.1* speaker system, which will be the focus of this review, and the *DTS 5.1* system.

For those who are looking in to buying a DVD player and don't have a good speaker system already, seriously consider buying one. The best feature of DVD discs is the superior quality of the soundtrack, without a surround sound set-up you will not receive all of the benefits of having a DVD player. The lower priced DVD players don't have any built in decoders and so need an external decoder attached to it to make the single audio feed in to six-channel sound. The top two models of the DigiTheatre come with a decoder, one as a separate decoder box and one on a PCI sound card.

The VideoLogic *DigiTheatre* speaker system comes in three guises:

- *DigiTheatre LC*: is just the speakers to connect to an amplifier or 5.1 surround sound decoder.
- *DigiTheatre PC*: consists of the speakers and a 6-channel PCI sound card for use with a (Windows based) home computer.
- *DigiTheatre*: comes with the speakers and a separate Zoran Dolby Digital decoder.

Each of the above variants are supplied with the same magnetically shielded 6-speaker set-up ready for producing 5.1 surround sound from your DVD player, amplifier or computer.

The *DigiTheatre* was the first 'poor mans' home cinema system on the market with a price tag of around £200 (depending on where you shop). Just recently a few more manufacturers have released sub £150 speaker systems but they don't come with a surround sound decoder of any sort, *Dolby Digital* or *DTS*.

Setting up the system is very easy. It is clear what goes where and with a little look in the manual after seeing the 'G9-DIN' cable, everything is ready to go.

The speakers were originally only available in black but since the higher end manufacturers have been producing shiny silver speakers, VideoLogic found it fitting to follow suit and have since released a silver coloured speaker system but it is only available with the top end model containing the *Zoran* decoder.

Getting a good signal

The decoder uses the *Zoran* DSP decoding chip to turn the digital audio input into Dolby 5.1 surround sound and is the main part of the system. (Note that it is not a DTS or THX decoder as these are much more expensive.) It can be bought separately from the VideoLogic Web site for around £100, but buying it as part of the speaker system means you get it for a reasonable discount.

The decoder box has several inputs on the back, two digital (a co-axial and optical SPDIF) and one analogue in the form of left and right RCA phono connectors. It also has five outputs; 3.5mm jacks for line out, centre, subwoofer, and surround as well as the monstrous 'G9 DIN' 9-pin output.

The type of device you are going to use the speakers with determines what type of inputs you will need to use. If you are using a DVD player and want the full *Dolby Digital 5.1 AC3* sound then you must use a digital input and of course the DVD you are watching must have a 5.1 channel soundtrack which most new films do.

A co-axial phono-to-phono wire is included with the speakers so you can get going straight away, connecting to the single phono socket on the back of your player.

The analogue input allows you to use your speakers up to *Dolby Pro Logic* standard, which is effectively 4.1 surround sound as it doesn't utilise the centre speaker.

For those of you with a newer DVD player you may notice an ›optical“ output on the back of it. This outputs a beam of light to send the audio tracks via a fibre-optic TOSLink wire (not included with the system) instead of electrically.

This is supposed to create an all round better sound, however, if you want to be able to hear this 'better sound‹ you will have to buy very expensive



The complete sound setup

speakers as there really is no difference.

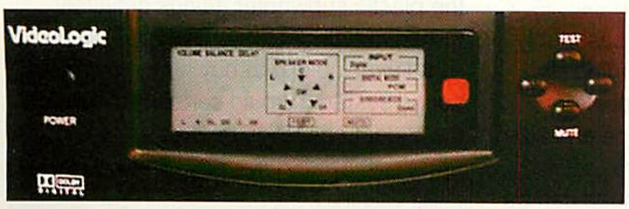
The main decoder output is via the 'G9-DIN' connector. Included with the speakers is a large cable that holds six wires, one for each audio channel. From the 9-pin DIN at the decoder it splits in to six phono connectors to plug in to the 'DVD input' of the amplifier on the back of the sub. I feel that the length of this cable is a problem and also housing the amplifier inside the sub. The main reason being that you can't hide the sub. If you went to another speaker manufacturers demonstration, one of the things they might mention is the ability to put the subwoofer anywhere in the room. With the *DigiTheatre* there is no chance of putting the sub more than about three feet away from the decoder due to the huge umbilical cord and the need to turn the amplifier on each time you want to use the system.

The decoder is the control centre of the system allowing you to control the following:

- Input: analogue or digital
- Surround mode: stereo, *Pro Logic* or AC3 (when available)
- Speaker mode: allows you to direct bass to the subwoofer from any of the speakers
- Volume: simple up or down
- Balance: adjust any of the speakers individually
- Delay: alter the time delay to the rear speakers

All of which can be changed by using the buttons on the front of the box or by using the credit card sized remote.

The buttons on the box are a little difficult to use and take some time to get used to. The designers seem to expect you to be using the remote at all times as the menu order is a bit obscure, running through the functions in the order they are listed above. All of the functions of the decoder can be activated using the



The decoder, which processes the sound output from the source

remote making life much easier, thus promoting the remote to 'must have status'.

It would also be an advantage if it were possible to turn the green backlit LCD panel off. The wires between the



Everything is at hand

DVD player, decoder and subwoofer mean that they must all be kept in close proximity therefore having to place them near the screen. When in a low-lit room to try and emphasise the whole film watching experience, the LCD and small power-on LED on the subwoofer really penetrate the darkness and attract your attention. There is no need to see the decoder when watching a film so nothing would be missed if it were turned off. Thankfully the other five speakers are a lot less conspicuous.

The speakers are housed in moulded plastic cases that seem to stand up to the test when playing at high volume. Some cheaper plastic speakers tend to resonate and produce an annoying rattle when playing at a certain frequency or volume; this thankfully doesn't occur with the *DigiTheatre* speakers.

Strangely enough, the 6.5 inch subwoofer is also contained in plastic housing, something you don't see very often. Most other manufacturers prefer to go for a wooden subwoofer casing to add a little more weight to reduce the chance of unwanted vibration and sound distortion. I must admit, however, that I was pleasantly surprised to find that the bass channel can be turned up to a chest thumping level before the thought that a wooden case would have been a better idea comes to mind.

One thing you will notice about the subwoofer when removing it from the bottom of the box is that it is particularly large. Standing at 406mm (approx 16.5 inches for those from the 'old skool') the sub looks the part for outputting frequencies ranging between 50Hz and 200Hz. The main reason for being so much larger than most subs that come with other home cinema systems is that it also houses a 6-channel amplifier to output a total of 62.5 Watts RMS or a more impressive-sounding 1000 Watts PMPO.

The front right and left channel speakers consist of two speakers mounted one on top of the other with the ability to twist in the middle.

The two blocks contain a 4-inch woofer and a 2-inch tweeter capable of producing a volume that could fill a very large room. While not physically the smallest speakers on the market, they would be able to find themselves hiding discreetly in any average sized living room.

The wires that connect the front speakers to the amplifier are of a fair length (approx. 2m or 82") so allow them to be separated enough to create the surround sound effect.

Stuck in the middle

The centre speaker matches the scale of the others but doesn't really need to be quite so large considering it only has to hold a 3-inch cone. The speaker delivers clear and undistorted sound no matter what the volume level. This speaker has to produce clear sound as it delivers most of the speech when outputting 5.1 sound.

The surround speakers are attached to the amplifier via ridiculously long wires. Unless you have a living room that you can play football in there should be no worries about getting the speakers behind you. With a *Dolby Digital* set-up it is advised that the rear speakers do actually go behind you as opposed to beside you with a *Pro Logic* set-up. This can create problems for people with a smaller room, but this isn't down to the speakers so there is no need to make comment.



The inputs for the subwoofer

The manual gives reasonably clear information regarding where to place your speakers depending on the shape and size of your room, any more information you may need can be extracted from the Dolby Web site at **www.dolby.com**.

If you don't have enough space on your shelves to spread your speakers out, you can buy speaker brackets that allow you to fasten the two front and two rear speakers to the wall so removing the requirement for flat surfaces everywhere and allowing you to fit the speakers at ear level, which is the recommended height. Other options are available; again, see the Dolby Web site for more information regarding speaker placement.

For the price of this system there are hardly any competitors. The sound is wonderful and fills any room it is used in.

The speakers were tested using a fairly wide variety of DVD films with different styles of soundtracks. The speakers were always up to scratch, producing brilliant audio. At times it was necessary to turn down the volume a bit, something that doesn't occur very often with me.

Only on very few occasions was there any speaker rattle that could be heard above the audio. Obviously there are a few resonant frequencies that effect each type of speaker individually, but this only rears its head at high or low frequency (or volume).

The benchmark

To see how far the speakers could be pushed it was time to remove the new-fangled DVD factor and bring on the good old stereo soundtrack from the CDs of today.

Normal audio CDs can be listened to using your DVD player, so there is nothing to stop you from using a home cinema system to listen to your music in your living room.

Some songs have particularly good bass lines and can be used to provide a standard for showing how good a subwoofer or general speaker system is. One of my particular favourites for testing speakers and subs in particular is called "You Got The Love" by The Source. Not necessarily to everybody's taste, but it is only to provide a benchmark. Honestly.

The subwoofer reproduces the bass line very nicely with the satellite speakers also outputting very nice stereo sound. These speakers are able to stand up to the test, without a doubt.

After a bit of a shaky start with seeing the plastic subwoofer, things definitely turned out alright.

If I was looking to buy a new surround sound system I would certainly consider the VideoLogic *DigiTheatre*.

Philip Gilbert
phil@philgil.co.uk

Wakefield Show 2002 details

Saturday & Sunday 18/19 May 2002

Thornes Park Athletics Stadium
Horbury Road
Wakefield

website: **www.wakefieldshow.org.uk/2002/**
e.mail: **showinfo@wacg.org.uk**

Opening times

Saturday 10:30 to 17:30
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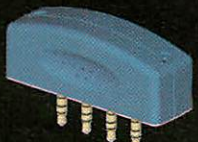
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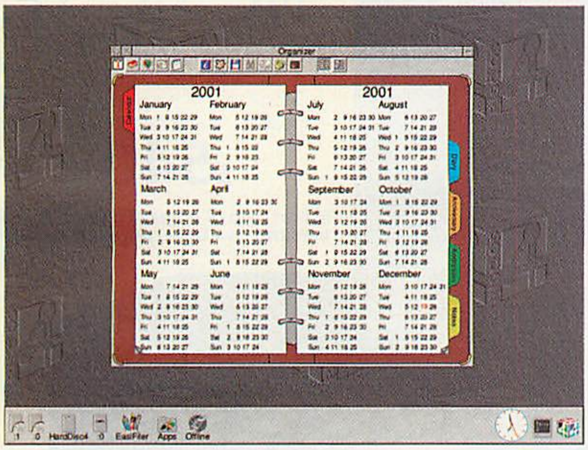
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Whose desktop is it this month?

Welcome to this month's edition of Through The Desktop. Did you guess the owner of last month's featured desktop? It was non-other than Steve Turnbull, previous Editor and keen RISC OS fanatic. If this is your first episode, let me remind you of what this is all about: Each month we take a look at the desktop of a notable individual in the RISC OS market and see what software and utilities they use regularly. Keep your eyes open as you're bound to spot an elusive utility that you've been seeking for ages...

This month's desktop is a minimal and restrained affair; more so than Mr Turnbull's. Very few programs are loaded



A minimal desktop for a fast, clean boot-up.

upon boot-up and there are no icons on the pinboard. This person likes their computer to load fast and dislikes a cluttered iconbar. This suggests someone who possibly needs all the iconbar space they can get once they get into the swing of things, as well as hating to wait for computers to boot.

A cursory glance over the pinboad and iconbar reveals that this person has deemed RISC OS 4 a worthy upgrade; the 4 Switcher icon is present and the RISC OS 4 disc icons are in use. The pinboard backdrop is a standard RISC OS 4 one, with the RISC OS 4 logo set against a grey texture. This is not someone who fiddles around changing icons and adding huge bitmap images to their backdrop; they like the standard RISC OS 4 look as it is.

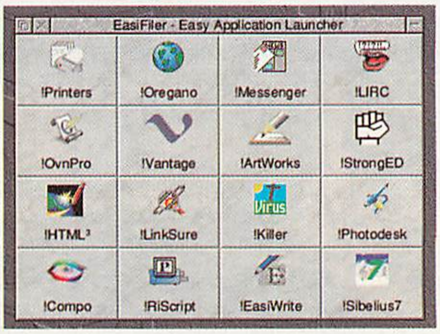
Delving under the bonnet, we see that this is a high-end machine. A Kinetic processor card, CD-RW, lots of RAM, 2Mb of video RAM and indeed a second slice point towards a power user. The 2Mb of video RAM is the power behind a screen mode of 1024 x 768 with 32,000 colours running at 70Hz. This is driving an iiyama 15" TFT screen, suggesting prolonged use of the machine, requiring a screen that is easy on the eyes. Here we have no distortion, no glare and no flicker.

Back to the actual desktop and we see that there are three programs loaded automatically on boot-up. These are: *EasiFiler* (program launcher), *DialUp* (Internet connection suite) and *Organizer* (electronic organization of life). The presence of *DialUp* suggests someone who uses the Internet a lot, perhaps as a big part of their work. This suggestion is furthered by a brief investigation of *DialUp*, which has *Oregano*, *MessengerPro* and *FTPc* set as the default applications; this person needs lots of functionality and rock-solid performance from their Internet software.



A rather more cluttered desktop connected to the Internet.

This person needs to be organized and also have contact details close at hand, hence the presence of *Organizer*. They have it displaying an analogue clock on the iconbar so the time is always at hand. *EasiFiler* is an application launcher that allows you to have up to 16 applications linked to from the filer window, where a single click



All major applications close at hand.

loads the said application (and closes *EasiFiler's* window). The owner of this month's desktop would seem to appreciate simple but useful applications. They also find it immensely useful having their favourite software immediately to hand. A busy person?

Investigation of *EasiFiler* shows such stalwarts such as *Ovation Pro*, *Vantage*, *ArtWorks*, *Photodesk*, *Composition*, *EasiWriter Professional+*, *Sibelius7* and *RiScript*. This is all professional software (the latest versions, too), pointing to someone who uses their computer for serious work or business. *HTML3* and *Oregano* suggest that this person creates or maintains at least one Web site. The *Zap* and *StrongED* war continues and this person has chosen to be a *StrongED* user.

Not one for daft harddrive names, this person has chosen to name the sole harddrive HardDisc4. This is an 8Gig unit, a very healthy size for RISC OS and big enough for large graphics files. This harddrive is sorted out into various sections: Software, Saves etc. Each of these sections is neatly sorted, except maybe Saves which is sorted but rather messy at the same time. We've seen the main software on this machine, so we'll take a look inside the Utilities+ directory. This directory has had a lot of extra utilities added, most of which appear to be graphics related. There's also the obligatory Archive utilities plus some Viewers for *TextEase* and *OHP* documents, amongst others.

So, here we have a desktop untarnished by modifications and add-ons, with just three applications starting automatically on boot-up. Standard RISC OS 4 icons and backdrop are in use and we have a lot of professional software, mostly design orientated. Most utilities seem to be graphics orientated. Perhaps we have a professional user, who is using their computer for work (the lack of games suggests this); they want speed, power and reliability. Who owns a desktop like this?

Find out next month.

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Management

Control is centralised in a TotalBoot NC installation, making it easy to manage and providing a secure, tamper-proof environment. Because all software and configurations are controlled by the central TotalBoot server, the NC does not allow pupils to alter application settings and viruses cannot be introduced. Central management also saves time as the ICT co-ordinator will no longer have to move from machine to machine, solving individual problems. Furthermore, when the server is upgraded, all stations are instantly upgraded.

Applications

Along with curriculum content and communications applications, TotalBoot NC installations can run Windows™ and Acorn RISC OS applications, providing access to a range of industry standard and education specific software titles.

All NC TotalBoot installations come with NC Works - an integrated productivity suite including word processor, spreadsheet, database, graphing tool, drawing tool, painting package and JavaScript Web browser. Our NCs provide access to all the core ICT tools in an easy-to-use environment.

See us on Stand D10 at BETT 2002



Access

When used with a NetManager server, TotalBoot NC installations provide Internet access and e-mail for all stations - the communications tools needed to plug into the National Grid for Learning. A wealth of curriculum material provides a powerful intranet learning resource. Both e-mail and web access can be controlled and logged thus giving you control over what can and, more importantly, what cannot be seen.

Integration

TotalBoot NCs can be integrated into an existing ICT infrastructure protecting the school's investment and extending the lifespan of resources. Old PCs, including 386s and 486s, can be used as thin-clients, giving a new lease of life to legacy systems.

As long term member of the Citrix Solutions Network (it's over 5 years since our first thin-client network was installed), we are ideally placed to implement and integrate your ideal network.



Cost Effective

As all files and applications are managed centrally, NCs do not require hard discs, floppy drives or CD-ROM drives on each terminal. This gives dramatic savings on unit costs. Expensive NT servers are not obligatory.

Because NCs have no moving parts, there is little that can go wrong. With PCs, most technical support requirements stem from changing user settings. Because this does not apply to NCs technical support is dramatically reduced. As a result, there are savings on repair bills and on costs associated with downtime and disruptions to teaching schedules.



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Macromedia discuss education at BETT 2002

At the recent BETT Show 2002 Acorn User had the opportunity to chat with Pat Brogan, Macromedia's Vice President of Education worldwide. While it is true that the Macromedia applications cannot be run natively on RISC OS there are several education network solutions that make it possible to use it — and Flash support is developing apace.

We asked Pat to explain what Macromedia wants to achieve with the Web in relation to Education.

"What we want to achieve is to enable kids from a very young age, to let them use the Web creatively — not by teaching them technical matters, but by providing the tools that it possible for them to think in terms of the result they want and to reach that easily without the tools getting in the way. The keywords are collaboration — communication — creativity."

On the matter of collaboration we asked whether she didn't think that computers tended to bring about more of an individuation, communicating only with the computer rather than with others.

"Our experience doesn't give that impression. Small groups working together to create Web pages, as part of larger groups working together to produce entire Web sites, this is what the enabling of children can do. They learn to collaborate, to plan and implement that planning. A kid playing a computer game in their bedroom is another matter altogether but we are not dealing with that.

"However one of our areas of concern is for girls in particular. Right now 90% of Web designers and programmers are male, we want to create the tools that get away from the nuts and bolts level of Web programming — something which boys seem to prefer and which then creates a barrier for the girls. We want to take away the restraints.

"It is not a good thing to have to say, but is unfortunately a fact, that one of the other main barriers to learning about the Web and how to use it are the teachers — not all, of course, but it is a truism that the older the teacher the less inclined they are to use the Web as a resource to assist in their teaching.

"The teachers can find it hard to learn the skills necessary and then cannot integrate the excellent resources that are available into their teaching. It is important to inspire the kids early so that is another are we are working on. We have invested heavily in a teacher training portal called 'TrainingCafe.com' which already has 20,000 members, teachers who are trying to expand their understanding."

We asked Pat how she saw teaching as the Web expanded in terms of resources and training:

"Currently there are worldwide efforts to develop good standards for distance e-learning. Managing resources, creating online curriculum schemes. Macromedia are taking a very active role in these standards developments because we consider it very important that we get it right.

"A crucial area in these standards is the development of methods of making Web data available to people who are disabled in various ways making it hard for them to access Web resources in a meaningful way. If it is viewed without thought it appears that the only thing we can do is make everything text and only use text browsers but that isn't the case.

"Ultimately we see all education being available on the Web and the teacher then acts as a facilitator being able to help those children who need assistance in understanding and can receive the direct help that they need. Meanwhile those who can forge ahead aren't held back."

We did discuss other areas but Pat asked us quite specifically to make this point to all the readers of Acorn User:

"In September 2002 all commercial Web sites will be required by UK law to be made accessible to users with differing levels of ability. This law already exists in the USA with very heavy legal penalties for failure to comply — the rules are not so harsh in the UK but it would be better for anyone designing Web sites to think about it now rather than having to engage in expensive retro-fitting towards the end of the year."

Certainly something worth knowing - spread it around.

All aboard the Big Bus

Following on from Pat Brogan of Macromedia's comments on the increasing availability of useful Web resources and the extension of broadband services making it feasible to run these resources directly through the Web with minimal downloading — the *Big Bus* finally arrives.

The *Big Bus* did have a stand at BETT 2001 but it was simply sitting on the upper gallery looking interesting without

News bites

Playmates from Clic

The *Riverside Playmates* and *Riverside Stories* are two new packs to support KS1 Literacy available in *Textease* format from Clic.

Get to know the delightful Riverside Playmates in the first of the Riverside and Woodland Playmates collection, written and illustrated by Bernsie. The characters come to life through enchanting illustrations on the pages of this talking book and through them, an awareness of wildlife and conservation is fostered. Read about them, or listen as they tell you about themselves. Who are Abigail, Freddie, Daisy, Mattie and Willie? What are they? Where do they live? What are their favourite foods and games?

The pack includes work screens of different levels of difficulty. Colour coding assists the younger or less able users and there are opportunities for free writing for the more able.

Listen to the *Riverside Stories* - a collection of three short stories suitable for young learners. Who is Lewis and why did he deserve a surprise? What happened to Freddie as he lay on his back in the river and what was Daisy's gift?

The special features of *Textease* allow young learners to follow new themes and make up their own stories about these delightful characters.

Call Gaynor or Thomas of Clic on **01248 679295** for more details.

More options at less cost

From the 1st January 2002, Precedence Technologies are pleased to announce a reduction in cost of all Precedence NC bundles — those including a monitor. This brings the basic price for a complete TotalBoot NC system with 15" monitor, keyboard, mouse, headphones, network cable and mouse mat down to only £360.

The reduction even includes our highly-competitive multimedia 15" TFT bundle which is now available for only £540 (over 20% cheaper than a Slym). We are also pleased to announce support for booting NCs from CompactFlash and SmartMedia. This means you have more choices than ever before about where and when you use your TotalBoot NCs.

If connected to a network, you can boot from a Precedence NetManager or an NT server. If you do not have a suitable boot server, you can run simply as a Web browser (via a proxy if required) or straight to a Citrix ICA session. Away from a network, you can boot from a Zip drive, a SmartMedia cartridge, a CompactFlash memory cartridge or even an IBM Microdrive. Please contact us for pricing and upgrade possibilities for your existing NCs.

For more information, please go to

much activity. It has taken a full year to bring the next stage on from *Argosphere* to a working result — the various changes between Argonet, Imparo and Freedom 2 have now settled down and even Andrew Foyle could be found along with Imparo's Ian Goodall on the new and exciting *Big Bus* stand this year.

So what is the *Big Bus*? A subscription educational service for schools and for the home providing interactive educational content for 3 to 10 year olds (KS1 and 2) with careful attention to content, differentiation and a wide range of activities to match the national Curriculum and Schemes of Work to aid in planning.

The whole idea is to provide useful curriculum content ion a form that can easily be integrated into classroom teaching.

You can catch a ride on the *Big Bus* by calling **01243 815845** to get your free sampler CD-ROM. E-mail **info@thebigbus.com**, go to the Web site at **www.thebigbus.com** or you can write to **The Big Bus, 7 Dukes Court, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 2FX**.

BT to invest in education

All over for another year as BETT draws to another successful conclusion. Interestingly during the show BT announced that it was going to invest £9.7 million in education and published a survey showing that technology is raising standards in education.

While 98 per cent of teachers say that technology improves the quality of their teaching, 95 per cent believe that technology boosts pupil attainment and employability.However, 85 per cent felt that pupils from less privileged backgrounds are disadvantaged when it comes to today's ICT-focussed curriculum.

In addition, 50 per cent of teacher worry that technology can aid cheating. Of some concern is the fact that 59 per cent find it hard to keep up with the latest developments. Maybe we can help ...

Soft Options

Softease (01335 343421) were cooking up a storm this year not only showing off *Textease Presenter* but *Textease Turtle*, *Branch* and *Curriculum Resource Packs* for science, maths and English.

Textease Turtle is suitable for Key Stage 1-4, beginning by teaching simple movement of a single object and progresses to more complex programming and control over multiple objects.

Then *Textease Branch* is a branching database and allows pupils to sort and classify information in a branching database. Again aimed at Key Stages 1-4, it allows children to gradually build up a database by providing 'yes' and 'no' answers to questions they create themselves thus helping them to build data handling skills which are at the core of ICT capability with strong links to the science curriculum as well. Simple but effective, children build up a binary tree that can be viewed on screen in multiple scales and views.

There is also a poster printing facility which allows whole trees to be printed

Everyone's a winner

The votes are in and the results are out, here are the BETT awards for 2002:

- Free Online Learning Resource: **Count on - *www.counton.org***
- Subscription Learning Resource: **Granada Learning - *Primary Zone***
- Primary Education Software: **2Simple Software - *2Simple Toolkit***
- Secondary Education Software: **4Learning/Channel 4 - *Macbeth CD-ROM***
- Primary Software Tools: **2Simple Software - *Infant Video Toolkit***
- Secondary Software Tools: **Apple - *iDVD***
- Further Education: **Army/Ed Coms - *Your Army CD-ROM***
- Primary ICT Hardware: **Promethean - *ACTIVboard Plus***
- Secondary ICT Hardware: **Promethean - *ACTIVboard Plus***
- Support for ICT: **CYNNAL - *NOF ICT Training***
- Special Educational Needs Software: **Crick Software - *Find Out and Write About Series***
- School Management Solution: **The Skills Factory - *New Literacy and Numeracy Complete Online CD-ROM***

In addition there were two discretionary awards made by the judges. The first was to **DCP Microdevelopments** for ***Log IT Explorer*** and in the category of ICT beyond the classroom there were two companies; **4Learning/Channel 4** for ***www.gridclub.com*** and the **LJ Group** and **Norwich City FC** for their ***Extra Time Online***.

www.precedence.co.uk or contact Precedence Technologies by e-mail to **sales@precedence.co.uk** or telephone on **01223 562500**.

New version of TotalFiler

Precedence Technologies are pleased to announce the release of version 1.13 of *TotalFiler*. This is available as a free upgrade to all registered customers of earlier version of *TotalFiler*. Feature highlights in the upgrade include:

- Support for permanent connections as well as "at logon" and "on demand" connections.
- Mounts may be set up as hidden, so that no icon is shown.
- Logon and logout scripts may be defined, e.g. to display pinboard icons upon a successful logon and remove them upon logging out.
- Scripts can be run at startup after all permanent mounts have been connected to. For example, this allows applications on the network to be booted
- Improved error messages
- Will kill NetFiler if desired.

TotalFiler is network front-end application offering a single point of logon for all network resources including home areas, applications, e-mail and *Windows ICA* sessions. It is similar to *NTFiler* from Atomwide but is lower cost, faster and more powerful. *TotalFiler* will connect to any network resources with *NetFS* (*Level 4*), *ShareFS* (*Acorn Access*), *LanManFS* (*Windows NT* or *Unix*) or *LanMan98* (*Windows NT* or *Unix*).

In addition, it will allow automatic connections to *Citrix ICA* servers without the user having to log in again. *TotalFiler* is also capable of controlling ANT *Marcel*. When a user logs in, it can automatically configure and run *Marcel* on-the-fly including site-wide signatures. When the user logs out, it will disconnect from the mail server and quit *Marcel*.

A site licence for *TotalFiler* costs £79. Network access utilities (*NetFS*, *ShareFS*, *LanManFS* and *LanMan98*) must be purchased separately.

Educational video merger

Viewtech Film and Video and Educational Media Film and Video are the UK's leading independent suppliers of educational video programmes for many years.

However, from the beginning of the year they have joined forces to become Viewtech Educational Media. They can be contacted on **01454 858055**.

Hard Access

Penny & Giles have a new range of control devices in their catalogue. First comes a mini variable-pressure switch.

This smaller Joggle Switch is a rotate-to-set variable pressure switch compatible with all popular mounting systems. The

onto A4 sheets for assembly into an impressive classroom poster.

Online News

Community Intranet is a new service from NTL Business and claims to offer strict levels of filtered internet access for children at home and school. Provided by NTL working with Local Educational Authorities, *Community Intranet* allows pupils, teachers and parents to work together and share information in a virtual classroom - safe from the dangers of public internet - as schools, homes and organisation in LEA are connected in a secure, private network.

This means that parents can allow home internet access for schoolwork without monitoring their usage or installing filtering software. For more information visit **www.ntl.com /education**.

General Business

Kidsmart is aimed at 8-11 year olds and their parents and teachers and is the brainchild of charity Childnet International and Tiny. Centered around the SMART rules - five key reminders for children to ensure that their experiences on the internet are enjoyable and safe: Secret - always keep your name address, mobile phone and password private.

Meeting someone you have contacted in cyberspace can be dangerous so only do so with your parent's or carer's permission and when they can be present. Accepting e-mails or opening files from people you don't know or trust can get you into trouble and Remember someone online may be lying and not be who they say they are. Stick to the public areas in Chat rooms and if you feel uncomfortable get offline.

The project runs in three separate programmes: Schools Activity Day including a 30-minute drama and role play workshop run by a touring drama group; evening seminars for parents; and lesson plans and worksheets for teachers to help then run safety sessions before and after the activity day. The KidSmart project has its own web site - www.kidsmart.org.uk - which also includes lists of fun and informative sites for children to visit, lesson plans to download and advice.

New email system

Equinet introduced a new email content scanning and blocking system for schools. With the ability to allow headteachers to prevent the use of inappropriate words in e-mails which controlling who is able to send e-mails to their pupils. Called NetPilot Safemail and all e-mails from unrecognised senders go first to the headteacher or ICT coordinator and once vetted they're forwarded to the pupil's individual email account and future mails from that sender are no longer vetted.

This is when NetPilot Safemail comes into its own as it picks up anything offensive in subsequent correspondence and re-routes such mails to the administrator. Find out more at **www.equiinet.com**

Espresso launched at BETT

Launched at the show was *Espresso For Secondary Schools*. Part of this new service is the ability for children to use *Espresso* at home via the homework service which incorporates printable worksheets and links to relevant web sites.

The complete secondary service also includes differentiated extension activities such as 'Take me Further' giving gifted pupils the opportunity to make further in-depth research into topics and 'Having Problems' which gives examples and advice for children having difficulties with exercises.

The service in the main consists of lesson resources based around current and topical television programmes and news reports supported by relevant web sites, interactive activities with animated guides to help students along as well as differentiated paper-based extension activities.

Primary users are not forgotten though, for instance, look at *20th Century Archive* which is aimed at Key Stage 2 and incorporates over 60 video ration books and video footage.

Divided into decades, each sub-section looks in more detail at topics such as fashion, famous people and transport. Meanwhile for Key Stage 1 users, *Story Starts* incorporates 16 real-life video stories with supporting photos and activity worksheets for four genres - adventures, funny, scary and amazing.

Each category comprises four video stories which encourage the viewer to use their imagination to extend or complete the tale.

The narrated video stories can be stopped and rewound at any time while multimedia drag and drop games involving the matching of words to objects in the story can also be played.

There are also various methods for encouraging pupils to begin their own stories using the theme of the story they have studied.

See more at **www.espresso.co.uk**

manufacturers say that it is particularly suited to younger users with poor motor skills or users with weak, limited movements where a normal mouse or joystick would be too sensitive to control.

Add to this Headway a new type pf head-pointing device which aims to be cost-effective, comfortable and reliable. A small head-mounted transmitter is light and comfortable to wear with its built-in tilt sensor allowing simple head movements in two axes to result in on-screen mouse emulation.

Then there is 4talk4, a classroom speech output device designed with Inclusive Technology. It has four large coloured buttons each with its own message.

There is a choice of four distinct sound levels for pre-recorded messages. Reportedly the speech is not only clear but can be adjusted to be loud enough for school assemblies!

In addition plastic pocket inserts let you use your own pictures to represent the messages.

The company can be contacted by telephone on **01425 463100**.

Mapping out the future

There are maps galore thanks to Ordnance Survey's MapZone - **www.mapzone.co.uk** .

Dedicated to the 7-14 age range it aims to make learning and using maps fun and interesting. The site features Our Favourite Places which is a guide to Britain's child-friendliest attractions produced by children themselves.

Using a unique interactive map of Great Britain, children can find new places to go and decide what to do when they get there based on the recommendations of pupils their own age.

These tourist guides include comments, photos and artwork all created by children at the participating schools. Then there are games, competitions, and homework help is on the way, so watch this space.

Virtual communities

Look out for a new schools linking project launched by Comic Relief and The Day Chocolate Company to create a virtual community between young people in the UK and Ghana to bring the concept of fair trade to new audiences.

Called Dubble Lives - **www.dubble.co.uk** - it will educate people about their place in the chocolate supply chain and how it links to the lives of cocoa farmers.

Pupils at Parkside Community College in Cambridge and Effiduase Demonstration Primary in Ghana piloting the project for the last year and have been learning about their similarities and differences.

Pam Turnbull
educ@acornuser.com

Your technical queries answered

With the Christmas festivities over, it is time to put away my heat sink. An odd sentence for those who don't know, but during my first year at work back in the late sixties I rescued a heat sink from a skip. It had three stud mounting diodes on the base and had fins of diminishing size rising from the base. In fact it looked like a Christmas tree and I call it my Christmas heat sink. It usually makes an appearance on my desk each year. Over the years it has acquired some extras, like threads of tinsel and the odd LED. This year there was a bi-coloured LED and even a blue one, driven directly from the printer port of a Risc PC sat on my desk, flashing away merrily.

On the last day, however, as everyone knows you are allowed to bring your toys in, so I brought in my computer controlled xylophone (Christmas 1993, the Micro User) which played a series of carols, much to the satisfying annoyance of all in my lab; that's about 60 engineers, not bad for one project.

Have you noticed that an increasing number of JPEG files found on the Internet can't be decoded with *ChangeFSI*? It may be just me, but I feel something needs to be done to address this. I recently got some books in the series of NASA mission reports, Apollo 14 and 15. These come each with a CD ROM packed with the pictures from the mission, TV footage and 360° Quicktime panoramas. Most of this was inaccessible on the RiscPC. The TV footage would play but at high speed and with no sound. I fear if I had only a RISC OS computer then I would be effectively bared from this product. It appears increasingly we must run to stand still.

Now being independent from the staff at Tau Press I feel I can throw in a bit of criticism now and again; in this case, concerning the article by Neil Farnham-Smith last month about the Fuji range of cameras. One thing that wasn't mentioned was the camera's interface. Increasingly, these are USB as such are currently useless for the RISC OS consumer. The same goes for those adverts for digital cameras; most of them are unusable by us until a USB interface, and more importantly software, comes along.

First off feedback from last month, Tim Powys-Lybbe writes:-

Just seen the article and noted that the guy was using Power Manager version 1.90. While Gary Partis has not been that available for help over the past year or so, he has eventually got round to producing an upgrade that solved all the problems I knew of and the version number is now 2.12. A modest fee may be due, though, to obtain this.

Thanks Tim, could someone let me know if this fixes the problem.

Now the continuing story of Robin Hampshire and his 1 wire bus project featured in the Christmas issue. He writes:

Many thanks for your continuing support for my 1-Wire project. I must remember to use more smilies in my narrative if you are to publish my irony and then comment on it :-) [isn't irony a bit like stonery and copperwire, at least that's what Baldrick says — Mike] **In fact, I mentioned 2^48 devices in reply to what you had mentioned in your RTR63, Finding your way around the 1-Wire Bus. After my initial total ignorance of the serial port and your attempts to educate me, I now find that using the commands *SYS "OS_SerialOp"*, and *SYS "OS_Byte"* in their various guises has been pretty successful. I am currently restricted to the use of one serial port, and by the use of a serial switch I can change over from a modem on one side of the switch to my own program on the other.**

I have to ensure that the comms program is not running at the same time as the 1-Wire stuff. Until very recently, I had been getting subtle and niggly problems with this setup. Unfortunately, when quitting or suspending my application in order to use a comms program I had been neglecting to reset the serial port the way it was before, so small but significant hitches were occurring when logging-on to the internet, or trying to use *Organizer* to dial out phone calls via the modem.

I now reset the serial port to the settings which are present at boot-up, and the problems have gone away. The comms application and *Organizer*, for dialling out via the modem, use so-called block drivers, usually residing in *!SerDev*, which are important to their set-up. What can I do to make my 1-Wire make use of the "InternalPC" driver, or any other for that matter, and what are the benefits of using this intervening layer? Is it possible to incorporate support for these drivers into a *BASIC* or, as I use, *S-Base* program?

The benefit of using intermediate layers of software or drivers is that it forms an abstraction layer from the hardware. This means when the hardware changes all you need to do is to change this layer and the application running on top can continue as before.

If you write this layer after there are several versions of hardware are known about it can detect what hardware you have and drive it appropriately without bothering the application. As to you using it, it depends on being able to get information about what the driver is doing and what calls it accepts. Sadly I don't know of such information for this driver, can anyone help?

Now, a rarity these days, a letter written on paper from Mr. I Chasmer. Whilst it is always nice to receive any communications, this one had a cursive font (joined up like hand writing) which was good to look at but played havoc with the optical character recognition software, so I had to type it in by hand. So, a plea not to use this sort of font if you would:

I recently purchased, at the RISC OS 2001 show, the excellent *Draworks Millennium*, after using its predecessor for many years. However, I have had the following problems whilst trying to install it. On running the install program it runs as follows: installing *DrawWorks* .. installing *DrawWorks* Support .. installing *FontFiend* .. installing *FontFiend* Support .. installing *MrClippy*; then a message appears, "Compact Disk fault 447".

I have increased my configuration buffers to the maximum of 512k from 32k but the message still appears. I have also set it to none, then a message appears "Compact Disk fault 443". I returned this CD to Mr David Holden of APDL who was most helpful. He noted that the CD was scratched and dirty despite it being brand new and unused. He could find no fault with the CD and it installed perfectly on his machine.

I was, however, sent a brand new

replacement CD but this behaved identical to the first. The computer is a RISC PC 700, with RISC OS 3.6 and an ARM 700. The CD drive is unknown but fitted as standard by Acorn. I have had no trouble with any other of the many CDs I have used.

No magic wand here but let's look at the facts. As you have had two CDs that work on someone else's system but not on your own, there must be something different about your system. Just as a guess I would say that some system path is not being set correctly, maybe due to it being set already by something else. In other words, something else is interfering with the installation script.

The thing to do is to take it from the Installing *Mr. Clippy* by hand. Look at the installation program in an editor and see what it is doing, then try to do this by hand by dragging and dropping the files in the appropriate directory.

Sorry it's not too definitive but it is what I would do if faced with the same problem. Incidentally the error messages of which you speak are unknown to me and were not in any manuals I have. Has anyone done a definitive list of error message numbers and what they mean? On the Macintosh there are various applications where you type in the error number and it comes up with an explanation; anything on our machine? I know it's a bit more difficult on our machine because error reporting is much more in the domain of the application rather than the operating system.

Mr Howard got a letter answered recently but was not satisfied with the answer, so asked again, which is fine by me:

You answered a letter of mine a few issues ago, I thought I was clear in the description of my system, it seems not. This Morley interface was designed to fit internally in an A3000 fitted with an ARM2 processor and RISC OS 2 operating system . As described, my system is an upgraded and expanded A3000 fitted with an ARM3 processor, 8 Meg RAM, 3.2 Gig Hard drive (partitioned), CDROM and RISC OS 3.1. The Hard drive and CDROM are external & connected to the Expansion socket via an APDL IDE interface The question still remains, will this interface work satisfactory on the A3000 bearing in mind its Operating system and the User Port / Analogue Port interface ROM version?

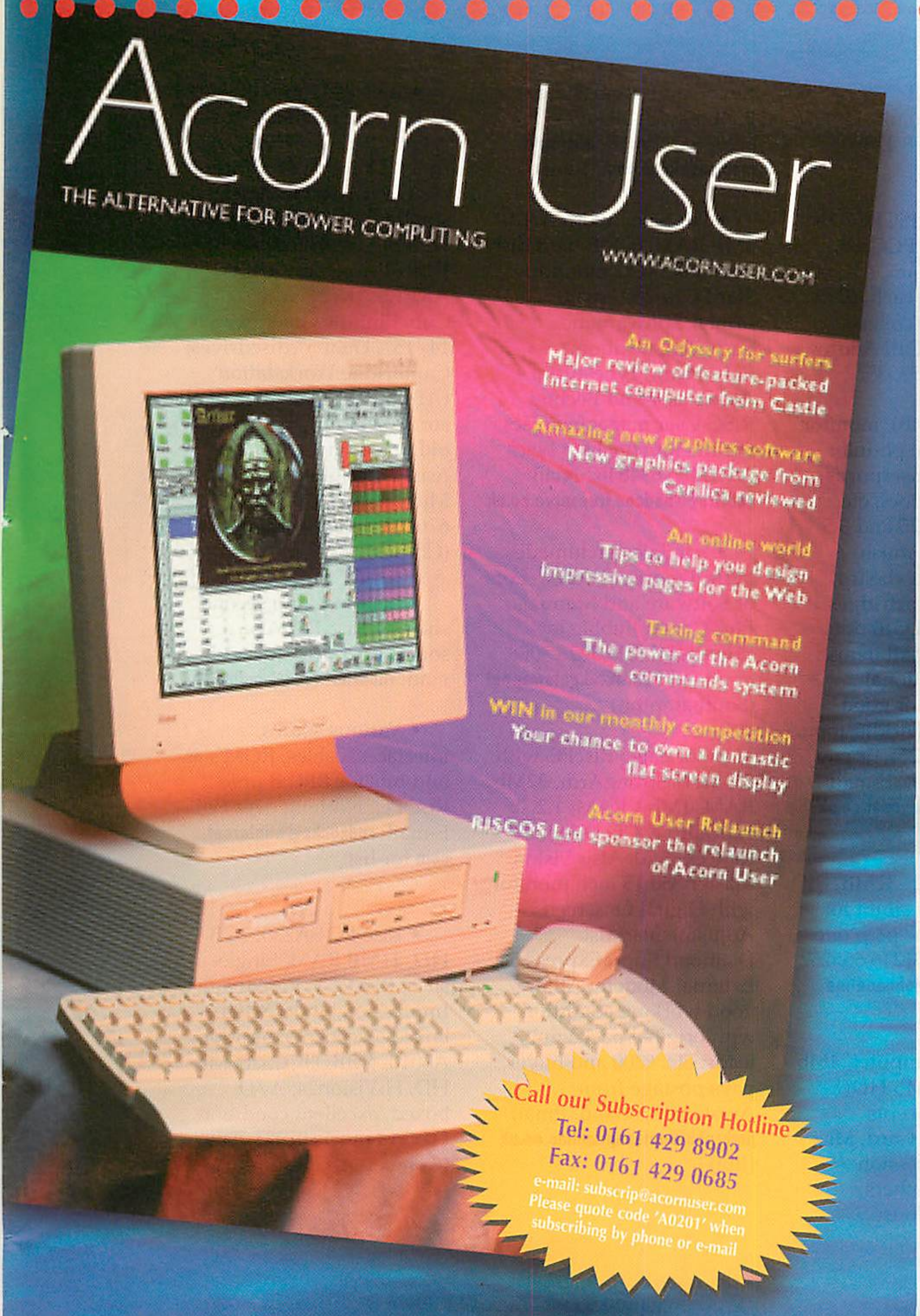
I have no knowledge whether the U-A port ROM has been upgraded to operate with RISC OS 3.1 or if the ROM needs to be upgraded. Are there any Acorn User readers who may have used this type of interface or has any information that is installation sheets or data sheets.

I must assume that as you are asking this question then your interface doesn't work and you are attempting to determine if it is the board that is faulty or if it is now incompatible with your improved setup.

While I have not had experience of this particular model of interface card I have had an identically functioning one made by Acorn from getting my original Risc PC. This has continued working throughout all the upgrades you describe. I would imagine that this card would also be able to cope with such an upgrade as there is nothing fundamental that has changed with these upgrades.

It is just possible that the driver code in the board is not compatible with the newer processor but I would be surprised if this were the case. Do a *Modules command to see if it fits the bill, it will be in the last dozen or so entries. Also do a *Unplugged to see if it has become disabled. Any readers got any comments?

Mike Cook
rambles@acornuser.com



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- S-Base tutorial

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SCHOOL CLEAROUT: thirteen A3020 network computers, two Risc PCs, and two A7000s all with monitors (various). Offers to Roger Toll at: **rjtoll@cathedralschool.hereford.sch.uk** Tel: 01432 363554 (school/day), 01981 590255 (home/evening)

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Looking for Basic and anything else for makinga Springboard card workingmail: **pieter_drost@aconet.org** (Voorburg Netherland)

For sales: Archimedes A3000 computer, Monitor, Stand, Mouse, Teletext Adapter, Manuals and lots of software. The lot for £40. Buyer to collect, York area. Tel 01904 768328

A7000 base unit with CD Rom (qty 2) £80 each, A3010 £20, BBC-B with diskdrive £15. All working, include software. No monitors. Email **craig@craigb.co.uk**, Telephone 01698 428907 Hamilton.

For sale: two RISCPC700s with CDROM, PCCard, 812Hd, 10MbRam, AKF60 monitors. £150 each, £275 the pair. Buyer collects. Huntingdon. Call Andrew Hynes 01480-353535.

• A3010 (4Mb), monitor, HCCS Ultimate podule: 200Mb Disc + userport + scanlight 256, docs, etc. BBC Master, 5.25 and 3.5 drives, Hybrid music synthesiser + keyboard, various ROM cartridges, docs, etc. Star LC10 dot matrix printer. All items FREE to educational establishment, or good home. Collect (Addlestone, Surrey, near M25), or pay carriage charges. E-mail: **kieran.okeeffe@argonet.co.uk** for details.

• For Sale. 2x 32MB simms, 1x 4mb simm for RISC PC £30 inc p&p ono will split. Tel: 01246 555252 or email: **john@johnandtina.freeserve.co.uk**

• A5000 Computer, 4Mb Risc OS 3, 420Mb HDD, Computer Concepts Graphics Gold Card, Misc Software: Impression / Artwork plus others, Computer / Mouse / Keyboard but no Screen, First reasonable offer accepted. Email: **alistair@macleodblaine.com** (Kent)

• For Sale: Acorn A3010, 4MB RAM, 60MB hard disc, manuals, AOC monitor, Star LC24-200 colour printer, software inc. Easiword, Ovation, Pipedream, Typestudio + Acorn user and Beebug RISC User magazine discs. £50 the lot Hinckley Leics. Tel 01455 634846, email **geoffrey@badcoe.freeserve.co.uk**

• For Sale: Archimedes perfect working order. Lots of Software and Manuals. Plus Canon Bubble Jet Printer. Tel: 023 8023 3088. or e-mail **PBurn@ukgateway.net** (Southampton)

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• A3000+Monitor Stand. RO3, spare motherboard. A420/1,RO3,with 2 Int.H/D and Video Capture card+Ext 1Gb HD & CD in small tower. A410/1, RO2-with old (working) AKF12. JP101 Printers(2) AKF11, AKF12, AKF17. Microvitec Cub, Phillips Green Screen 14/15", Dual 5". discdrives; Cambridge Workstation (ABC) + software. Box of all sorts-including, books and old games etc. No reasonable offers refused. Michael Jones, 01244 676407. **mjones@waitrose.com** (Chester)

• Looking for a second slice for Risc PC. Also a sound card. Any ideas? E-mail: **rhodribritton@t-online.de**

• Various spares, interfaces, cables, ROM's & odd bits for BBC B upto Risc PC. Nothing over £20. E-mail: **redsocks@btinternet.com** for list.

• Risc PC SA233, 1GB HD, 21MB RAM, Single-slice, RPM 1-5, Pipedream4, Impression, Style, MIDI, boxed, excellent condition; A3010, 4MB, HCCS, 80MB HD, HiVision24, A/D, boxed, excellent condition. David Francis 07973 796873 (Congleton, Cheshire)

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Does buying second-hand support RISC OS?

Dear Sir,

Do RISC OS dealers benefit from people buying second-hand RISC OS computers privately? Having recently added to my collection of RISC OS computers by buying a second-hand A7000 (from a dealer) I feel entitled to express an opinion.

The fact that there is a second-hand market for RISC OS computers means there is a good chance that the seller will be replacing their old RISC OS computer with a new one – from a dealer.

Secondly, it would be unusual for anyone to buy a second-hand computer complete with all the software they want. So who are they going to buy new software from? A dealer.

Thirdly, in case anyone still doubts that it is acceptable to buy privately, you might like to know what a RISC OS dealer said to me when I was placing an order for a MicroDigital Omega. I asked if he would like my RiscPC in part exchange and received the reply 'sell it privately - you'll get more money for it'.

In conclusion, we can all support RISC OS dealers without necessarily buying new computers from them. It is pretty obvious that we all support dealers when we buy RISC OS hardware or software, but we can support them in other ways too. In recent months I have bought a mains adaptor for my digital camera and a pack of Zip discs. I could have bought either of these items from a high street shop, but instead bought the mains adaptor from Photodesk and the Zip discs from CTA. The market is looking quite healthy at the moment with the Kinetic from Castle and the new laptop from RiscStation, but remember that dealers sell other things as well. If people didn't buy Zip discs and other miscellaneous items from CTA, we might still be without a laptop.

Mark Syder
via e-mail

Where people buy their second-hand computers off dealers, it does of course bring benefit to the RISC OS market. Of course, it still remains less beneficial than a new machine, because the manufacturers don't get a look in if a dealer sells a second-hand machine.

Your point about buying software having purchased a machine off a private seller is an interesting one. Indeed, if the person buys a basic RiscPC, for example, and then upgrades it (perhaps with a Kinetic card) and then buys some nice, new software then it puts a totally different light on the whole argument.

We would agree wholeheartedly with you about buying standard goods from RISC OS dealers. Sometimes you pay a little more because of buying-power limitations, but you do get expert knowledge and advice, something you will not get in your local PC Word or Dixons.

Internet woes

Dear Sir

Some time ago Reflex Electronics (now out of business) fitted a modem into my Acorn RiscPC 700, installed the necessary software and registered me with the ISP Madasafish.

Within a few weeks I received six or seven CDs fro other ISPs touting for my custom not one of which was any use to me at all – they were, of course, only suitable for Windows. (How did word get round the grapevine that I had bought a modem? Not much security there.)

In September I had the nerve to go on holiday and therefore did not use the Internet for about eighteen days. Since my return home I have not been able to logon – the linen is permanently engaged, even at 3.00 am.

I have phoned several ISPs in response to their advertisements, but when I say I use an Acorn computer, with no Windows, I get back a blank sounding "EH??".

My query is, is there any other ISP apart from Madasafish that supports the Acorn platform?

John Lunan
via snail mail

There are indeed more ISPs that support the Acorn/RISC OS platform directly. Argonet (now Freedom2) – www.argonet.co.uk – are the most well-known for offering dedicated support to RISC OS users. However, it is currently unclear whether they are still signing up new customers.

Real Ingenuity – www.realingenuity.net – have many lines of business, one of which is providing access to the Internet. They offer direct support to RISC OS users, as well as those using that other platform. In fact, they are a RISC OS dealer (you will probably remember their adverts in Acorn User) so these chaps really know what they're talking about.

Not so long ago, if you wanted hassle-free access to the Internet on your RISC OS machine, you had to use an ISP with dedicated RISC OS support. Being restricted to a small handfull of ISPs was blatantly unacceptable, so RComp set about changing all of that. Their connection software, DialUp, allows RISC OS users to use virtually any ISP. The software comes with an impressive number of scripts to get yourself connected to the ISP of your choice, although signing up in the first place can still pose a problem. However, if you can phone an ISP and signup over the telephone, DialUp will let you connect whether they support RISC OS or not.

When you sign up to a Windows ISP on the Web, there is often an option to automatically configure your computer. This is done via a Windows .INS file. Perhaps the most useful thing about DialUp is that it accepts these files and uses them to set itself up to connect to that particular ISP.

In your letter you mentioned your details being passed to different ISPs. I doubt very much whether Reflex Electronics would have done that; I suspect that it would have been Madasafish, or another Internet company whom you may have given your details to. You only have to forget to tick that little box once...

Finally, I would point out that yes, Reflex Electronics went into liquidation, but the Acorn business continues under the name of ITC UK.

The Acorn User relaunch

Dear Sir,

Congratulations on your new appointment as the editor of Acorn User. I recognize your name as a regular and helpful poster on c.s.a.* news groups and feel happy that the magazine now has you at the helm.

I noted your comments about re launching and promoting the magazine (and indirectly the platform). I hope that AU budget constraints will allow for a good level of publicity.

I believe there is a great opportunity for the RISC OS platform afoot, with the

imminent launch of the omega, and various other systems from RiscStation and Castle. As AU is our only high street magazine, I feel that you are in a great position to make a big difference.

Rebecca Macgregor
via email

Thank you for your comments. We are always happy to accept letters of praise!

Readers will be happy to know that we do indeed have firm plans to promote the magazine and, consequently, the platform. In fact, you're looking at the first step right now. We've created a completely fresh look to the magazine with much more content on each page. Just compare this issue to any issue of last year.

Acorn User now carries more general computing and technology news, as well as comprehensive coverage of developments in the RISC OS market. We've even changed the slogan to reflect this. It's all about attracting new readers and showing them how good RISC OS is.

We will continue to strive to show existing and potential users just how good RISC OS is and what one can achieve using the remarkable software available for this platform. Look out for more tutorial series, something you've all been asking for.

Dear Sir

I'm afraid that you won't find me on any subscription list, but I've been reading Acorn mags since the Electron User.

I use to enjoy typing in the listings of applications and games, I got quite good at debugging my mistakes even if I do say so myself. Although I never progressed to learn BASIC programming (which I since regret).

I don't expect Acorn User to go back to those old listings days, but I do think that program listing are a great insight too budding programmers, any programming tutorial would be better to have listings opposed to the programs being on a disc. This would make the student type the listing in, giving invaluable experience.

Another thing from the not to distant past are the cover disc, the decision to use CD's probably seemed to be a good one at the time, but due to the sudden increase in storage space the content soon ran out. I'm sure there are enough PD releases and updates for us to have a 1.6M floppy disc every two or three issues, everyone likes freebies and I'm sure that 99% of readers looked forward to an issue with a disc on the front.

Now the future, is it time that we forget Acorn? When I get into conversation with anyone that is not a RISC OS user and I talk about my Acorn machine, they either say something along the lines of "one of those old things" or "oh you still use an Archimedes". Either way, it's the negativity of the past that gets me. Now if I'm in conversation and I say I use a RISC OS machine, I generaly get a response of "what's that?" not a negative response but a positive "I want to know more sort of response".

I can then respond with the many advantages of RISC OS and its use.

So perhaps the re-launch of Acorn User ought to be the launch of "RISC OS User" for a positive and productive future?

Carl Chant
via email

I have to agree with your comments on programming. Having to type in code, without the possibility of just copying a chunk from the finished thing, would seem the only way one is ever going to learn to program. I found this when learning HTML; not until I started writing code out, as opposed to pasting from existing code, did I learn the more complex code, such as tables. Tables are actually quite easy most of the time, but only after you understand them. I imagine it's the same for programming.

Just in the last few days I have taken the plunge and decided to learn BASIC. After much searching, I found a book by Ray Favre, called Starting BASIC. At just £16, including an example disk, I couldn't resist. I will be reviewing the book (and my progress) in a later addition of Acorn User.

I understand that some people might be upset at the decision to stop the cover CD. We have three main reasons for this. Firstly, the market has matured so that, in general, we have only one or two programs for each different area of computing (DTP, bitmap graphics, music notation etc).

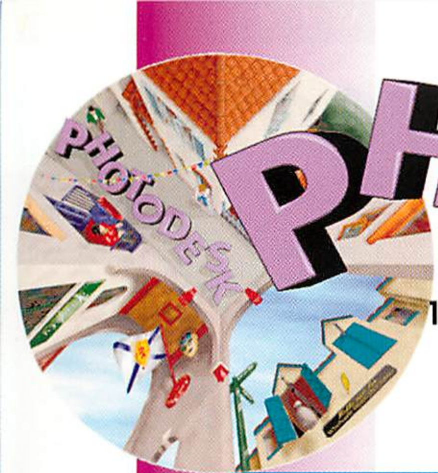
This rules out giving away full versions of a modern program. This is not a lack of software, as such. Quite simply, the best software has survived. If you buy any currently-developed RISC OS software, you can be sure it will be excellent. But there's not really enough around to give away!

Secondly, just about all of our readers are on the Internet. All freeware, PD software etc has moved from magazine cover discs to the Internet. This gives you the advantage of being able to obtain the latest version of software at any time. Our CDs would soon become out-of-date.

Lastly, in light of so many readers being online, we can make available for download any example files to go with tuorials.

With reference to dropping 'Acorn' from our name, this was a possibility but we soon realised that there was no viable alternative (all the RISCs and RISC OSes have already been used at some point). Changing names can often be the wrong decision. People are loyal to a brand and in this case the brand is Acorn User. When you think of posting a letter, do you think Royal Mail or Consignia? In light of this, we decided to keep the name as is.

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